

THE ARGOSY.

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THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XIII.

WINTER AT HERON DYKE.

THE mellow autumn months darkened and died slowly into winter. The wild winds that are born in the bitter north blew in stronger and fiercer gusts, and the majestic monotone of the sea grew louder and more triumphant as the huge tides broke in white-lipped wrath against the shuddering sands. There came tidings of fishing-boats that never found their way back home, of great ships in the offing that made signals of distress, of dead bodies washed up here and there along the shore. The Easterby lifeboat was ever ready to brave the fiercest seas ; while miles away across the seething waters, at once a signal of warning and of hope, the ruddy beacon of Easterby lighthouse shone clear and steady through the darkest night : it was like the eye of Faith shining across the troubled waters of Life.

At Heron Dyke, to all outward seeming, the winter months brought little or no change in the monotony of life within its four grey walls. And yet there were some changes ; all of which, unimportant as they might seem if taken singly, had a distinct bearing on events to come. The two housemaids, Martha and Ann, to whom Aaron Stone had given warning in his anger at what he called their folly, were not forgiven. They left the Hall at the expiration of the month's notice, giving place to two strong young women who came all the way from London ; and who, never having been in the country before, were supposed to be superior to the ordinary run of superstitious fancies which so powerfully affect the rural mind. Aaron took care that Martha and Ann should be clear of the house before Phemie and

Eliza arrived at it : there should be no collusion with the new comers if he could prevent it.

All went well at first. Phemie and Eliza felt dull, but were sufficiently comfortable. They had plenty to eat, and little to do. Not having been told that the Hall was supposed to be haunted, to them the north wing was the same as any other part of the house, and they neither saw nor heard anything to frighten them. The deaf and stolid cook kept herself, as usual, to herself, and said nothing. Indeed, it may be concluded that she had nothing to say. Had a whole army of apparitions placed themselves in a row before her at the "witching hour o' night," it would not have affected her ; she utterly despised them, and the belief that could put faith in them.

Old Aaron chuckled at the success of his new arrangements. "We shall be bothered with no more cock-and-bull stories about grisly ghosts now," thought he.

But, though the new maids were safe enough from hearing gossip inside the house, they were not out of it. Aaron, however good his will might be, could not keep them within for ever : they must go to church, they must go to the village ; they claimed, although strangers in the place, a half-holiday now and then. And the first half-holiday that Phemie had, something came of it.

The girl made the best of her way to Nullington. Small though the town was, it had its shops ; and shops have a wonderful fascination for the female heart. Into one and into another went Phemie, making acquaintance with this vendor of wares and with that. Mysterious things were talked of ; and when she got back to the Hall at night, she had a rare budget of strange news to tell Eliza.

The Hall was haunted. At least, the north wing of it was. A young woman, Miss Winter's maid, had mysteriously disappeared in it one night last winter, and had never been heard of since. The two previous housemaids had been nearly terrified out of their wits afterwards. They had heard doors clash after dark that were never shut by mortal hands ; they had heard a voice that sobbed and sighed along the passages at midnight ; and they had been once awakened by a strange tapping at their bed-room door, as if someone were seeking to come in. More dreadful than all, they had seen the deathlike face of the missing girl staring down at them over the balusters of the gallery in the great entrance-hall : and it was for being frightened at this, for speaking of it, they were turned away ! —which was shamefully unjust. All this disquieting news, with the observations made on it, had Mistress Phemie contrived to pick up in the course of one afternoon's shopping, and to bring home to Eliza.

The two servants had now plenty to talk about in the privacy of their own room ; and talk they did : but they were wise enough at present to keep their own counsel, and to wait with a sort of dread expectancy for what time might bring forth. Would they hear

strange sabbings and sighings in the night? would a ghostly face stare suddenly out upon them from behind some dark corner when they least expected it? The dull depths of these girls' minds were stirred as they had never been stirred before. They half hoped and wholly dreaded the happening of something—they knew not what.

Meanwhile they began to go timorously about the house, to shun the north wing most carefully after dark, and to keep together after candles were lighted. Old Aaron, silently watching, was not slow to mark these signs and tokens, though he took no outward notice. While his wife Dorothy, watching also in her superstitious fear, drew in her mind the conclusion that the girls were being disturbed as the other two girls had been.

It fell out one afternoon, about three weeks after Phemie had brought her strange tidings from Nullington, that Eliza was sent to the town on an errand by her mistress, Mrs. Stone: for, to all intents and purposes, Dorothy Stone acted as the women-servants' mistress, whether Miss Winter might be in the house, or whether she was out of it. Eliza was later in starting than she ought to have been, and she was longer doing her errands—for she took the opportunity to make purchases on her own account—and it was dusk before she turned back to Heron Dyke. It was a pleasant evening, cold but dry, with the stars coming out one after another, as she went quickly along the quiet country road, thinking of her mother and sisters far away. She turned into the park by the lodge on the Easterby road, stopping for a couple of minutes' gossip with Mrs. Tilney, the gardener's wife. How pleasant and homelike the little lodge looked, Eliza thought, full of ruddy fire-light; for Hannah Tilney would not light the lamp till her husband should arrive. The elder girl was making toast for her father's tea, the younger one was hushing her doll to sleep, while Mrs. Tilney herself was setting out the tea-cups, and the kettle was singing on the hob—all awaiting the return of the good husband and father.

Bidding the lodge good-night, Eliza went on her way. It was quite dark by this time, and although the hour was early she did not much like her lonely walk through the park. She was not used to the country, and the solitude frightened her a little; fancy whispering that a tramp might be lurking behind every tree. She pictured to herself the lights and bustle of London streets, and was sorry she had left them. Leaving the carriage-drive to the right when she got within two or three hundred yards of the Hall, she turned into a shrubbery that led to the servants' entrance. It did seem very lonely here, and she hurried on, glancing timidly from right to left, her heart beating a little faster than ordinary.

Suddenly a low scream burst from her lips. A dark figure, emerging from behind a clump of evergreens, stood full in her path, and placed its hand on her arm. Eliza stood still; she had no

other choice ; and trembled as she had never trembled before. It was a woman : she could see that much now.

"Won't you please let me speak with you ?" cried a gentle voice, which somehow served to reassure Eliza.

"My patience !" cried she, anger bubbling up in the reaction of feeling, "how came you to frighten me like that ? I was thinking of —of—all kinds of startling things. What do you want ?"

"You are one of the new maids at the Hall," rejoined the figure, in low, beseeching accents, "and I have been trying for weeks to get to speak to you."

"Who are you?—and what do you want with me ?" demanded Eliza.

"I am Susan Keen."

"Susan Keen," repeated the servant, not remembering at the moment why the name should seem familiar to her. "Well, I don't know you, if you are."

"My sister lived at the Hall, Miss Winter's maid, and she disappeared in her bed-room one night last winter," went on poor Susan, with a kind of sob. "It was full of mystery. Even Mr. Kettle says that."

"Oh yes, to be sure," cordially replied Eliza, her sympathies aroused now. "Poor Katherine Keen ! Yes. What *did* become of her ?"

Susan shook her head. It was a question no one could answer. "I want you to help me find out," she whispered.

The avowal struck Eliza with a sort of alarm. "Good gracious !" she cried.

"I want you to help me find some traces of her—my poor lost sister," continued Susan, "some clue to the mystery of her fate —"

"But what could *I* do, even if *I* were willing ?" interrupted the housemaid.

"You are inside the house, I am outside," replied Susan, with a sob. "Your chances are greater than mine. Oh, won't you help me ? At any moment, when least expected, some link might show itself ; the merest accident, as mother says, might put us on the right track. Have you no pity for her ?"

"I've a great deal of pity for her ; I never heard so strange and pitiful a tale in all my life," was the reply. "Phemie was told all about it when she went into Nullington. But, you know, she may not be dead."

"She is dead," shivered Susan. "Oh, believe that. I am as sure of it as that we two are standing here. At first I didn't believe she was dead ; I couldn't ; but now that the months have gone on, and on, I feel that there's no hope. If she were alive she would not fail to let us know it to ease our sorrow—all this while ! Katherine was more loving and thoughtful than you can tell."

"It's said she had no sweetheart : or else —" Eliza was beginning. But the other went on, never hearing.

"If she were not dead, she would not come to me so often in my dreams—and she's always dead in them. And, look here," added the girl in awed tones, drawing a step nearer and gently pressing again Eliza's arm: "I wish someone could tell me why her hair is always wet when she appears. I can see water dripping from the ends of it."

Eliza shuddered, and glanced involuntarily around.

"Sometimes she calls me as if from a distance, and then I awake," resumed Susan. "She wants me to find her—I know that; but I never can, though I am looking for her continually."

"This poor thing must be crazed," thought the bewildered woman-servant.

"And I've fancied that you might help me. I've come about here at night, wanting to see you, and ask you, for ever so long. You can watch, and look, and listen when you are going about your work in the house, and perhaps you will come upon her, or some trace of her."

"Good mercy! You surely can't think she is *in* the house!" exclaimed Eliza.

"I am sure she's in it."

"What—dead?"

"She must be dead. She can't be alive—all these weary weeks and months."

"I never heard of such a belief," cried Eliza. "What it is that's thought—leastways, as it has been told to me and my fellow-servant, Phemie—is, that it is her spirit that is in the house, and haunts it."

"Her spirit does haunt it," affirmed poor Susan. "But she is there too."

Eliza felt as if a rush of cold air were passing over her.

"Something wrong was done to her; she was killed in some way; and I'd sooner think it was by a woman than a man," went on Susan dreamily. "It all happened in the north wing. And then they carried her away for concealment to one of the dark unused rooms in it, and left her there, shut up—perhaps for ever. That's how it must have been."

"Dear me!" gasped Eliza, hardly knowing, in her dismay, whether this was theory or fact.

"And so if you could watch, and come upon any clue, and would kindly bring it to us, me and mother, we'd be ever grateful. Perhaps you know our inn—the Leaning Gate—as you go from here to Nullington."

"Stay a moment," said Eliza, a thought striking her: "does your mother think all this that you've been telling me?—does she want me to watch?"

"Mother does not know I've come to you, or that I've ever had thought of coming, else she might have stopped me," answered the girl candidly, for poor Susan Keen was truth itself. "But she knows

Katherine must be in the house, dead or alive; she says that. Good-evening, and thank you, and I'm sorry I startled you."

She walked away at a swift pace. Eliza looked after her for a moment, and then ran home shivering, not daring to glance to the right or to the left.

When the last fine days of autumn were over and the cold weather was fairly set in, Squire Denison had ceased to drive out in his brougham, and was seen no more beyond the suite of rooms that were set apart for his personal use. Early in November his lawyer, Mr. Daventry, was sent for, and received certain final instructions respecting his will.

About the same time a fresh inmate came to Heron Dyke and took up her abode there for the time being. The person in question was a certain Mrs. Dexter, a professional nurse, who had been sent for from London by Dr. Jago's express desire. She was a plain-looking middle-aged woman, whose manners and address were superior to her station in life. A woman of few words, she seldom spoke except when someone put a question to her. She went quietly and deftly about her duties and employed all her spare time in reading. A sitting-room was allotted her next Mr. Denison's, and she never mixed with the servants. No one at the Hall, unless it was Hubert Stone, knew that Mrs. Dexter was an elder sister of Dr. Jago's wife. It might be that the treatment pursued by that undoubtedly clever practitioner, and which at present seemed to succeed, was of too hazardous a nature to be entrusted to, or witnessed by, an ordinary nurse.

Then came another movement. Within a few days of Mrs. Dexter's arrival at the Hall, the carpenter, Shalders, was sent for from Nullington. Receiving his orders, he proceeded to put up two doors covered with green baize, one in each of the corridors leading to Mr. Denison's rooms. The household wondered much; the neighbourhood talked; for Shalders had a tongue, and did not keep the measure a secret. It was to ensure himself more quiet that the Squire had had it done, said Shalders. Day and night these doors were kept locked. Four people only, each of whom had a pass-key, were allowed to penetrate beyond them: Dr. Jago, Mrs. Dexter, Aaron Stone, and Hubert. Anything that took place on the other side of those mysterious doors was as little known to the rest of the inmates of the Hall as if they had been a hundred miles away. In Nullington, people could not cease wondering about these baize-covered doors, and were generally of opinion that Squire Denison was growing more crazy than ever.

Ella never failed to write to her uncle once a week, and once a week the Squire dictated to Hubert a few lines of reply. In these notes he always told her his health was improving; that he grew better and stronger. For weeks after he had ceased to leave his own

rooms, he wrote to Ella—in his unselfishness, let us suppose—about his drives out and how the fresh crisp winter air seemed to give him strength. Ella expressed a strong desire to be back at home by New Year's Day; but the Squire's answer to her request, while kind, was yet so peremptory in tone that she was afraid to mention the subject again. He told her she was not to make herself uneasy about him, and that, now she was abroad, she had better enjoy herself and see everything that was worth seeing: when he wanted her back at the Hall he would not fail to send for her, but till that time she had better continue on her travels. If the body of the letter seemed hard to Ella, there was no lack of loving messages at its end. "You are always in my thoughts," he wrote. "I see your face in the firelight; I hear the rustle of your dress behind my chair; half-a dozen times a day I could affirm that I heard you singing in the next room. When you come back to me in spring, my darling, I will never let you go away again."

To Ella his letters would read almost like a contradiction. He could write thus, evidently pining for her, and yet would not allow her to return. She comforted herself with the reassurance that he must be better. Not the faintest hint was given to her in any one of the letters that Mrs. Dexter, a sick nurse, had taken up her abode at Heron Dyke.

Hubert Stone received several private notes from Ella, asking for full and special information respecting the state of her uncle's health. The writer of them little thought how they were treasured up and covered with kisses. To each of them Hubert wrote a few guarded lines of reply, confirming the general tenour of Mr. Denison's own letters. Miss Winter, he said, had no cause for uneasiness: Mr. Denison was certainly stronger than he had been for two years past. A few old friends of the Squire called at the Hall occasionally and enquired respecting his health. Now and again he would see one or other of them for a few minutes and talk away as if nothing were the matter with him.

But after the middle of December no visitors of any kind were admitted. They were told that the Squire was much as usual, but that his medical man, Dr. Jago, enjoined perfect rest as indispensable to him. When Dr. Spreckley heard this, he differed completely. "I always told Mr. Denison that he ought to see more company than he did," said Spreckley. "He wanted rousing more out of himself. The sight of a fresh face and a little lively conversation never failed to do him good."

It was a marvel to Dr. Spreckley that the Squire still lived. He wondered much what treatment was being pursued, not believing that any treatment known to him could keep him in life; he marvelled at other things.

"Hang it all!" cried the Doctor one day to himself. "I can't see daylight in it. Shut up in his rooms from people's sight; green-

baize doors put up to keep out the household!—what does it mean? Are they treating him to a course of slow poisons? Upon my word, if it were not that the object is to keep the Squire in life, I should think there was a conspiracy to send him out of it, and that they don't want to be watched at their work. But it is a strange thing that he yet lives."

That was, to Dr. Spreckley, the strangest thing of all. Morning after morning, as it arose, did he expect to hear the news of the Squire's death; but winter wore on, and the old year died out, and still the tidings came not. Dr. Spreckley marvelled more and more; but he said nothing to anybody.

CHAPTER XIV.

DR. DOWNES' SNUFF-BOX.

THAT winter in Norfolk was an exceptionally severe one. Lady Cleeve, whose health had been waning for some time past, felt the cold more severely than she had ever done before, and was rarely out of her own home. Trusting her son so thoroughly, the twelve hundred pounds had now been transferred to him, as promised, and stood in his name in the books of Nullington Bank. And to Philip life seemed to have become well worth living. The fact that he could draw cheques now on his own account—ay, and find them duly honoured—was a new and delightful item in his experience. His sunny, debonair face might be seen everywhere with a smile upon it: he had a kind look for this neighbour, meeting him in the street: a pleasant word for that one. He carried fascination with him; and, whatever might be his faults, it was impossible to help liking Philip Cleeve.

"A thousand pounds will be quite enough for Tiplady," he decided, after some mental debate, carried on at intervals. "If the old fellow lets me join him at all, he'll take me for that: money's nothing to him."

This, you perceive, would leave Mr. Philip two hundred pounds to play with: a very desirable acquisition. But the partnership question remained as yet in abeyance. Mr. Tiplady was very much engaged with some troublesome private affairs of his own at this period, was often from home; and for the time being seemed to have forgotten his talk with Lady Cleeve about the partnership.

Philip was particularly careful not to refresh his memory. His mother felt anxious now and then that no progress was being made: she spoke to Philip about it, only to have her fears pooh-poohed, and be put off in that young gentleman's laughing, easy-going style. "A month or two more or less cannot make any possible difference, mother," he said one day. "Besides, I don't think it would be wise to bother Tiplady just now. It will be time enough to speak when he has got through his law-suit with Jarvis."

It did not take Philip Cleeve very long to make a considerable hole in the two hundred pounds : set aside in his own mind as a margin to be used for whatever contingencies might arise. In the first place, his I O U to Freddy Bootle for his losses at cards in October had to be redeemed, Freddy having lent him the money to square up : although it might have stood over for an indefinite period as far as Freddy was concerned. This of itself ran away with a considerable sum. Then Philip discovered that he had been in the habit of dressing less well than was desirable, and so replenished his wardrobe throughout. After that, chancing to be one day at the jeweller's, he took a fancy to a gold hunting-watch and a couple of expensive rings. The latter articles he would draw off and slip into his pocket when going into his mother's presence ; while of the existence of the watch she knew nothing. Not for a great deal would he have had Lady Cleeve suspect that he had touched a penny of the twelve hundred pounds. Yes, he had faults, this Master Philip.

For some little time past, he had taken to be more from home than usual, in the evening, and to return to it later. Lady Cleeve did not grumble ; she but thought he was at the Vicarage, or at the house of some other friend. He was more often at The Lilacs than she was at all aware of. Not that she would have objected : she rather liked Captain Lennox ; and she knew nothing of the high play carried on there, or of the unearthly hours that it sometimes pleased Mr. Philip to come in.

It was not the play, though, that made Philip's chief attraction at The Lilacs. It was Mrs. Ducie. His pleasantest evenings were those when cards were not brought out, when the time was filled with conversation and music. On such occasions Philip left at the sober hour of eleven o'clock, and had nothing to reproach himself with next morning ; unless it were, perhaps, that when in the fascinating company of Mrs. Ducie, he almost forgot the existence of Maria Kettle.

Yet it was impossible to say that Margaret Ducie gave him any special encouragement, or led him on in any way. She was probably aware of his admiration for her, but there was nothing that savoured of the coquette in her mode of treating him. She was gracious and easy and pleasant, and that was all that could be said : and she drew an impalpable line between them which Philip felt that it would not be wise on his part to attempt to overpass. Meanwhile life was rendered none the less pleasant, in that he could now and then pass a few sunny hours in her society.

Early in December, Mrs. Ducie went up to London to stay with some friends, purposing to be away a month or two ; and after her departure Philip did not find himself at The Lilacs so often. One day, however, he chanced to meet Captain Lennox in the street, who gave him a cordial invitation for the evening, to meet some other fellows who were coming.

"I expect Camberley and Lawlor and Furness," said Captain

Lennox. "You don't know Furness, I think? Married a wife with four thousand a-year, lucky dog! Come up in time for dinner."

Of course Philip accepted. Indeed, it was a rare thing for him to decline an invitation of any kind. Company pleased him, gaiety made his heart glad.

Play, that evening, began early and finished late. The stakes were higher than usual; the champagne was plentiful. The clock struck five as Philip stood at his own door, fumbling for his latch-key. He had one of his splitting headaches, and his pockets were lighter by seventy pounds than they had been eight hours previously. Seventy pounds!

All that day he lay in bed ill and was waited upon by his mother, who had no suspicion as to the real state of affairs, or that he had been abroad late. Her own poor health obliging her to retire early, rarely later than ten, she supposed Philip came in at eleven, or thereabouts. His headache went off towards dusk, but the feeling of utter wretchedness that possessed him did not go off. He was a prey to self-remorse, not perhaps for the first time in his life, but it had never stung him so bitterly as now. In the evening, when he had dressed himself, he unlocked his desk and took out his bank-book. He had not looked at it lately. After deducting, from the balance shown there, the amount lost by him at cards the previous evening, together with two or three other cheques which he had lately paid away, he found that there now remained to his credit at the bank the sum of nine hundred and thirty-five pounds. In something less than three months, he had contrived to get through two hundred and sixty-five pounds of his mother's gift—of the gift which had cost her long years of patient pinching and hoarding to scrape together. At the same rate, how long would it take him to squander the whole of it? As he asked himself this question he shut up his bank-book with a groan and felt the hot tears of shame and mortification rush into his eyes.

He was still sitting thus when a letter was brought him. It proved to be a note of invitation from Maria Kettle, written in the Vicar's name, asking Philip to dinner on the 12th of January, her father's birthday. A similar note had come for Lady Cleeve. The Vicar always kept his birthday as a little festival, at which a dozen or more of his oldest friends were welcome. The sight of Maria's writing touched and affected Philip as it might not have done at another time. His heart to-night was full of vague longings and vain regrets, and perhaps equally vain resolves. He would give up going to The Lilacs, he would never touch a card again, he would cease to seek the society of Margaret Ducie—and, he would ask Maria to promise to be his wife. At this very Vicarage dinner, opportunity being afforded, he would ask her.

He was very quiet and subdued in manner during the next few days, spending all his leisure time at home. Some two years

previously he had taken a fancy to teach himself German, but had grown tired of it in a couple of months, as he had grown tired of so many other hobbies in his time. He now hunted out his books again and began to brush up his half-forgotten knowledge. His mother was delighted at the new industry : it gave her so much more of him at home.

The evening of the twelfth arrived, and Lady Cleeve and Philip drove over to the Vicarage in a fly. The brougham of fat, good-natured Dr. Downes was just turning from the door after setting down its master. Lady Cleeve went into a room to take off her warm coverings, and Philip waited for her in the little hall.

"What, you here!" he exclaimed, as Captain Lennox entered.

"Ay. Why not?"

"I should have fancied this house would be too quiet for you," returned Philip. "There will be no Camberley—no high play here."

Captain Lennox stroked his fair moustache and looked at Philip with an amused smile. "My good sir, do you suppose I must live ever in a racket? Mr. Kettle was good enough to invite me, and I had pleasure in accepting. As to Camberley—his play goes a little further at times than I care for."

A pretty flush mounted to Maria's cheek as she met Philip ; his laughing hazel eyes seemed to have a meaning in them, the pressure of his hand was more emphatic than usual. They had not seen much of each other lately. No direct words of love had yet passed between them, but there lay a sort of tacit understanding on both sides that one day they would in all probability become man and wife ; needing no assurance in set phrases that they would be true to each other and wait till circumstances should be propitious. Of late, however, Philip's visits to the Vicarage had been few and far between. Rumours had reached Maria of evenings spent in the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown, and of his frequent presence at The Lilacs. When Maria thought of Margaret Ducie's attractions, her heart grew sad.

The dinner guests numbered a dozen—all pleasant people. One or two handsome girls were there, but Philip had eyes for Maria only.

"How nice she looks!" he thought ; "how pure, how candid ! What is it that constitutes her nameless charm? It cannot be her beauty."

No, for Maria had not very much of that. It was the goodness that shone from every line of her countenance.

Dinner over, the Vicar and a few of his guests retired to his study for a sober hand at whist, leaving the drawing-room free for music and conversation : and the evening passed on. Ten o'clock struck, and Philip's momentous words to Maria were still unspoken. At last the watched-for opportunity came. In her search for some particular piece of music, Maria went downstairs to what she still called her school-room, and Philip followed. A single jet of gas was

lighted, and she was stooping over an old canterbury when he put his arm round her waist. She had not heard his footsteps, and rose up startled.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried, and sought to push his hand away.

"Do not repulse me, Maria," he whispered, a strange earnestness in his generally laughing eyes. "I am here to tell you how truly and tenderly I love you. I am here to ask you to be my wife."

"Oh, Philip!" was all that poor Maria could reiterate in that first moment of surprise.

"You must have known all along that I loved you, and I ought perhaps to have spoken before," he continued. "But I cannot be silent longer. Tell me, my dearest, that you will be mine—my own sweet wife for ever!"

Maria's face was covered with blushes. Her eyes met Philip's in one brief loving glance, but no word did she speak. He drew her to him and kissed her tenderly twice. His arms were round her, her head rested on his shoulder, when there came a sound of footsteps outside the door. An instant later, Philip was alone. How brief a time had sufficed to seal the fate of two persons for weal or woe!

Philip felt intensely happy now that the ordeal was over—although he had never anticipated a refusal from Maria. No more gambling, no more heating visits to The Lilacs, or evenings in the billiard-room; life would be full of other and sweeter interests now. His mother would rejoice in his good fortune, and all would be *couleur de rose* in time to come.

'Twas a pity that an unwelcome thought should intrude to mar the brightness. Somehow Philip began to think of the money he had drawn from the bank.

"What a fool I was to break into the thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, his mood changing to bitterness. "I might have confined it to the extra two hundred. That would not have so much mattered, while the thousand was enough for Tiplady. But to have lessened *that* by—how much is it—sixty or seventy pounds. If I could but replace it! If we had but gold-fields over here as they have yonder," nodding his head in some vague direction, "where a man may dig up to-day what will last him to-morrow. No such luck for me. *I can't pick any up.*"

A bustle in the hall—and Philip went from the room. Lady Cleeve was passing out to her fly, which waited for her, escorted to it by good Dr. Downes. She had already stayed beyond her time: Philip would walk home later. He helped to place his mother in it, wished her good-night, and returned to the rooms with the old Doctor.

At eleven o'clock the party broke up: late hours were not in fashion at the Vicarage. As Philip wished Maria good-night, he whispered that he should be with her on the morrow: and the warm

pressure of his hand and the love-light that sat in his eyes told Maria more than any words could tell.

Dr. Downes was fumbling with the sleeves and buttons of his overcoat in the hall: his own man generally did these things for him. "Let me help you, Doctor," said Philip: and buttoned it deftly.

"Thank you, lad," returned the Doctor. "Would you like a lift as far as I go?"

Philip thought he would, and got into the roomy old brougham, and chatted soberly with the old physician on the way. He got out of it when they came to the side turning that led to the Doctor's house, said good-night, and strode onwards.

Dr. Downes took snuff. A bad habit, perhaps, and one less general now than in the years gone by. He took it out of a gold box, one of great value, presented to him by a grateful patient, Lord Lytham: and this box, being rather proud of it, the old Doctor was fond of exhibiting in company. The first thing he did, arrived at his own fireside, his coat and comforter off, was to put his hand in his pocket for his snuff-box.

It was not there.

Had the Doctor found himself not to be there, he could hardly have felt more surprise. That he had not dropped it in the carriage, he knew, for he had never at all unbuttoned his overcoat: still he sent out and had it searched; and made assurance doubly sure. "Well, this is a strange thing!" ejaculated the Doctor.

"When did you have it last, sir?" asked Granby, his faithful servant of many years.

"A few minutes before I left the Vicarage," said Dr. Downes, after pausing to think. "The Vicar took a pinch with me; we were standing before the fire; and I distinctly recollect putting it back into my pocket. After that, I shook hands with one or two people, and came away."

"Suppose I send Mark to the Vicarage, sir?" suggested Granby. "He'd run there in no time: they'll not be gone to bed."

"It is sure not to be there," said the Doctor testily, as Granby came back from dispatching the boy. "How could it leave my pocket after I had put it safe in it?"

"Perhaps it did, sir—when you were getting on your coat to come away. Who knows? You are not clever at putting on that coat, sir—if you'll forgive my saying so—and turn and twist about like anything over it."

"Young Cleeve helped me. And the coat's tight and awkward. I suppose—I suppose," added Dr. Downes slowly and thoughtfully, "that Cleeve did not take the snuff-box to play me a trick?"

"Well, sir, I should not think he would play such a trick on you, though he is a gay and careless young spark."

"Oh, you think him so, do you, Granby?"

"I'm sure he is, sir," amended Granby. "He's more than that, too—a regular young spendthrift: and it's a pity to have to say it of Lady Cleeve's son. Half his time he is at the Rose and Crown playing billiards; and the t'other half he is playing cards for high stakes at Captain Lennox's, with my Lord Camberley, and other rich folk."

"Why, Granby, how the deuce do you know all this?"

"Why, sir, all the town knows it. Leastways about the time he spends in the billiard-room. And Captain Lennox's man happens to be an old acquaintance of mine, so we often have a chat together. It's James Knight, sir, who once lived with Sir Gunton Cleeve, and perhaps you may remember him."

"But—billiards, and cards, and high stakes—how does young Cleeve find the money for it all?" debated the Doctor.

"Ay, sir, that's the puzzle of it. Lady Cleeve can't give it him. Anyway, he has it; and sits at the Captain's card-table with a heap of gold and silver piled up before him."

Dr. Downes fell into a rather unpleasant reverie. He knew nothing of the money that Lady Cleeve had placed to her son's account in the bank, and he wondered where Philip's means could come from.

"Camberley and Lennox, and those rich fellows, may stake ten-pound notes if they choose to be so idiotic," cogitated the Doctor; "but such recklessness in Philip means ruin. What possesses the lad? Takes after his father, I'm afraid: he rushed into folly in his young days. But he pulled himself up in time."

Mark came back from the Vicarage, bringing no news of the gold snuff-box. The Vicar, much concerned, searched in the hall himself; he spoke of the pinch he had taken from the box, and he saw Dr. Downes return the box to his pocket. Dr. Downes sat looking uneasily into the dying embers of his fire as he revolved the news.

"Is it possible," he presently asked himself, "is it possible that Philip can have *stolen* the box? Stolen it to make money of for his cards and billiards?"

CHAPTER XV.

"PATCHWORK."

THE Reverend Francis Kettle and his daughter Maria sat down to their breakfast-table somewhat later than usual: the dinner-party of the previous evening had made the servants busy. The thoughts of each were pre-occupied: the Vicar's with the strange loss of Dr. Downes' gold snuff-box, of which he spoke from time to time; Maria's with the proposal of marriage made to her by Philip Cleeve: the most momentous proposal a young girl can receive. Presently Mr.

Kettle found leisure to take up a letter, which had been lying by his plate, unopened.

"Oh," said he, "it is from Mrs. Page."

Maria glanced up with a smile. "In trouble as usual, papa, with her servants?"

"Of course. And with herself, too," added the Vicar, as he read the short letter. "She wants you to go to her, Maria."

Mrs. Page was the one rich relation of the Kettle family: first cousin to the late Mrs. Kettle. She lived in Leamington, in a handsome house of her own, and with a good establishment; and she might have been as happy there as any wealthy and popular widow lady ever was yet. But, though good at heart, Mrs. Page was intensely capricious and exacting; she lived in almost perpetual hot water with her servants, and changed them every two or three months. This week, for instance, she would be rich in domestics, not lacking one in any capacity; the next week the whole lot would depart in a body, turned away, or turning themselves away, and Mrs. Page be reduced to a couple of charwomen. But her goodness of heart was undeniable; and many a Christmas Day had Mr. Kettle received from her a fifty-pound note, to be distributed by himself and Maria amongst their poor.

Every now and then she would send a peremptory summons for Maria; and the Vicar never suffered it to be disobeyed. "She is getting old now, Maria, she is nearly the only relative left of your poor mother's, and I cannot suffer you to neglect her," he would say. But he did not choose to append to this another reason, which, perhaps, weighed greatly with himself, and add—and she is rich, and will probably remember you in her will if you do not offend her.

"The servants all went off the day before yesterday, Maria; and she says she is feeling very ill, and wants you to go to her as soon as convenient," said Mr. Kettle, passing the letter to his daughter.

"But I cannot go, papa."

"Not go!"

"I do not see that I can. There is so much work at home just now."

"What work?"

"With the parish ——"

"Oh, hang the parish," put in the Vicar impulsively, and then coughed down his words. "The parish cannot expect to have you always, child."

"It is a hard winter, papa, as to work; many of the men are out of it entirely, as you know; and that entails poverty and sickness on the wives and children. I have not told you how very many are sick."

"Some of the ladies will see to them. You cannot be neglecting your own duties always, for their sakes."

"Once I get to Leamington, papa, there is no knowing when I may be allowed to return. Mrs. Page kept me six months once; I well remember that."

"And if she wishes now to keep you for twelve months, twelve you must stay."

"Oh, papa!"

"You are taking a lesson from Ella Winter's book," said the Vicar. "She did not want to leave home in the autumn; but it was all the better for her that she should. Her case, however, was different from yours, and I do not say she was wrong in wishing to remain with her uncle, so old and sick. I am not old, and I am not sick."

But Maria thought her father was sick, though not, of course, with the mortal sickness of the Squire; ay, and that, if not old, he was yet ageing. His health certainly seemed breaking a little, his eyesight was failing him; now and then his memory misled him. He displayed less interest than ever he had done in parish work, leaving nearly everything to the curate, Mr. Plympton, and Maria. His liking for old port was growing upon him, and he would sit all the evening with the bottle at his elbow, and was roused with difficulty when bed-time came. Altogether Maria would a vast deal rather not leave home; but she saw she should have to do it. Perhaps in her heart she shrank also from being away from Philip.

"I'm sure, papa, I can't think how things in the parish will get on without me," she said, as she laid down the letter. "Think what a state they were in when we returned in the summer."

The Vicar felt half offended. "Get on?" said he. "Why, bless me, shan't I and Plympton be here? As to the state they fell into during our stay abroad, was not I away myself? One would think, Maria, you were parson and clerk and everything."

Maria smiled her sweet smile. She knew her father set little store by her work in the parish, not in fact seeing the half she did, and she was glad it should be so.

"And I should not, child, let you neglect Mrs. Page in her need—your mother's own cousin—for all the parishes in the diocese. So you can write to Mrs. Page this morning, or I will write if you are busy, and fix a day to go to her."

Barely had they finished breakfast when Dr. Downes came in. The loss of the snuff-box grieved and annoyed him. Not so much for its value, not so much that it was the gift of a long-esteemed friend and patron, but for the uncertainty and suspicion attending the loss. That the box must have been cleverly filched out of his pocket he felt entirely convinced of: it could not have got out of itself. All night long between his snatches of sleep had he been pondering the matter in his mind: and he came to the uneasy conclusion that Philip Cleeve had taken it: either to play him a foolish trick, or to convert the box into money for his own use. But this latter doubt the Doctor would keep to himself and guard carefully. Mr. Kettle met the Doctor with open hand. It was not the Vicar's way to put himself out over things; but he was very considerably put out by this loss.

"I met that young blade, Philip Cleeve, in walking over here,"

observed the Doctor, as they were all three once more examining minutely every corner of the little hall—for, in a loss of this kind, we are apt to search a suspected spot over and over again. “ I took the liberty of asking him whether he had purloined the box in joke when he was helping me with my great-coat on here last night. It must have been then, as I take it, that it left my pocket.”

Maria was rather struck with the Doctor’s tone, unpleasantly so: it bore a resentful ring. “ Philip would not play such a joke as that, Dr. Downes,” she rejoined. “ What did he say?”

“ He said nothing at first, only stared at me and asked what I meant. So I told him what I meant: that my gold snuff-box had left my pocket last night in a mysterious and unaccountable manner, and I had been hoping that he had, perhaps, taken it, to play me a trick. He blushed red with that silly blush of his, assured me that he would not play so unjustifiable a trick on me, or on anyone else, and walked off, saying he had to catch a train. So there I was, as wise as before.—And the box is not here; and it seems not to be anywhere.”

“ Shall you have it cried?” asked Mr. Kettle, as they returned to the breakfast-room.

“ Why yes, I shall. Not that I expect any good will come of it. Rely upon it, that box has not been dropped in the road; it could not have been. It has been stolen; and the thief will send it up to London with speedy despatch and make money of it. My only hope was, and that a slight one, that Philip Cleeve had got it for a lark.”

“ But why Philip Cleeve?” said the Vicar, hardly understanding. “ Why not any other young fellow?”

“ Because Philip Cleeve put my coat on for me, here, in your hall; that is, helped me to put it on. I am sure the box was in my pocket then, it must have been; and when I unbuttoned the coat at home, the box was gone.”

“ You did not leave it in the carriage?”

“ I did not touch the box in the carriage: I never unbuttoned my overcoat, I tell you. Philip Cleeve knows that too: he went with me as far as Market Row.”

“ It really does look as though Philip Cleeve had taken it—for a jest,” spoke the Vicar.

“ No, no, papa,” said Maria. “ Philip is honourable.”

“ Not quite so honourable perhaps as folks think him,” quickly rejoined Dr. Downes. “ Not that I say he did, or would do this. Philip Cleeve has his faults, I fear; he must take care they don’t get ahead of him, or they may land him in shoals and quicksands. And a certain young lady of my acquaintance had better not listen to his whispering until he has proved himself worthy to be listened to,” added he, as the Vicar passed temporarily into the next room, “ and—and has got some better prospect of a home in view than he has at present. Take an old man’s advice for once, my dear.”

The stout old Doctor had turned to Maria, and was stroking her hair fondly. In his apparently jesting tone there ran an earnest warning: and Maria blushed deeply as she listened to it.

If the past night had been an uneasy one to Dr. Downes, it had also been one to Maria Kettle. Not from the same cause. Divest herself of a doubtful feeling with regard to Philip she could not. That he had no stability, that he was led away by any folly that crossed his path, and that—as Dr. Downes had but now put it—he had at present little prospect of making himself a home, a home to which he could take a wife, Maria was only too conscious of. *She* had a vast amount of common, sober sense; and in that respect was a very contrast to Philip. Maria herself would have waited for Philip for ever and a day, and never lost hope: but she, after this sleepless night was passed, had very nearly concluded that there ought to be no engagement between them; that it might be better for Philip's own sake he should not be hampered. It was rather singular that these words should have been spoken by Dr. Downes so soon afterwards to confirm her in her resolution.

In the afternoon, between three and four o'clock, when the Vicar had gone up to Heron Dyke, Philip made his appearance at the Vicarage. He was sent away on business for the office early in the day, and had but now got back. Maria met him with a pretty blush and held out her hand, as the servant closed the door; but Philip drew her to him and kissed her, sat down by her side on the sofa, and stole his arm round her waist. Maria gently put it away.

"Philip," she said, "we were both, I fear, thoughtlessly rash last night."

"In what way?" asked Philip, possessing himself of her hand, as it seemed he was not to have her waist.

"Oh—you know. In what you said and I—I listened to. I think we must wait a little, Philip: another year, or so. It will be best."

"Wait for what? What is running in your head, Maria?"

"Until our prospects shall be a little more assured. Forgive me, Philip, but I mean it; I am quite serious. In a year's time from this, if you so will it, we can speak of it again."

"Do you mean to say there must be no engagement between us?" fired Philip.

"There had better not be. Neither of us at present has any chance of carrying it out."

"Oh," commented Philip, who was getting angry. "Perhaps you will point out what you do mean, Maria. I can see no meaning in it."

The tears rose to Maria's eyes. "Philip dear, don't be vexed with me: I speak for your sake more than for my own. At present you have no home to take a wife to, no expectation of making one—"

"But I have," interrupted Philip. "Old Tiplady intends to take me into partnership."

"Well—I hope he will: but still that lies in the future. Your mother, I feel sure, would not like to see you hamper yourself with a wife until you are quite justified in doing it. And then, on my side—how can I marry? It would not be well possible for me to leave papa. And all the parish duties that I have made mine; the visiting and the schools —" Maria broke down with a sob.

"That young fop, Plympton, ought to take these duties," returned Philip with a touch of petulance. "What's he good for? Garden parties, and croquet, and flirting with the ladies. That's what he thinks of, rather than of looking after the poor wretches who live and die in the back lanes and alleys of the town."

"He is young," said Maria gently. "Wisdom will come with years."

"One would think that you were *old*, to hear you talk, Maria."

"I think I am; old in experience. And so, Philip," sighed Maria, returning to the point, "let it be that there exists no actual engagement between us. I shall be the same to you that I have been; the same always; and when things look brighter for you and for me —"

His ill-humour had passed away like mist in the sunshine, and he sealed the bargain with a kiss. "Be assured of one thing, my darling," he whispered: "we shall not have to wait long if it depends on me. I will spare no pains, no exertion to get on, to offer you a home that all the world might approve, and to be in every respect what you would have me be."

Maria told him then of the probability that she should have to go to Leamington for an indefinite period, should have to depart in the course of a very few days. Philip did not receive the news graciously, and relieved his mind by calling Mrs. Page selfish.

"I can't stay longer," he said, getting up. "That precious office claims me; old Best does not know I am back yet.—Here's a visitor for you in my stead, Maria," he broke off, as they heard one being admitted.

It was Captain Lennox: who was calling to enquire about the health of the Vicar and Maria after the previous evening's dissipation. Philip was going; and they all three stood together in the drawing-room for a minute or two.

"By the way, talking of last night, what is this tale about old Dr. Downes losing his gold snuff-box?" asked Captain Lennox. "The people at the library told me they had heard it cried, as I came by just now."

"So he has lost it," said Philip. "That is, he thinks he has. I daresay he has put it in some place or other himself, and will find it before the day's over."

"Did he miss it here?"

"No ; not till he got home. And he had the impudence to ask me this morning whether I had *taken* it, because I helped to button his coat," added Philip.

Captain Lennox looked at Philip, then at Maria, then at Philip again. "He asked you whether you had taken it!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Taken it for a lark. As if I would do such a thing! It's true I buttoned his coat for him, but I never saw or felt the box."

"I do not quite understand yet," said Captain Lennox.

"It seems that old Downes, just before he left, had his box out, handing it about for people to take pinches out of it. The Vicar took a pinch."

"I saw that," interrupted Captain Lennox. "They were standing by the fire. Two or three of us were round them. Old Miss Parraway was, for one, I remember ; I was talking with her."

"Well," rather ungraciously went on Philip, impatient at the interruption, "the Doctor took his leave close upon that. I took mine, and I found him in the hall here, awkwardly fumbling with his overcoat. I helped him to get it on, and he gave me a lift in his brougham as far as my way went."

"And when he got home he missed the box," added Maria, concluding the story, as Philip stopped. "It is a sad loss—and so very strange where the box can be, and how it can have gone."

"Yes, it is strange—but I did not thank him for asking me whether I had taken it ; there was a tone in his voice which seemed to imply a suspicion that I had—and not as a joke."

"And did you?" said Captain Lennox.

Philip, who had been turning to the door after his last speech, wheeled round to face the Captain. "Did I *what*?"

"Take it for a joke?"

"No, of course I did not. Good-bye, Maria."

"Here, you need not be so hasty, old fellow," laughed Captain Lennox, following Philip out. "You are as cranky as can be to-day. Of course you did not steal the box, Cleeve ; and of course I am not likely to think it. If I did, I should say so to your face," added the Captain, his light laugh deepening. "But—I say—do you know what this puts me in mind of?"

"No. What?"

"Of Mrs. Carlyon's jewels. They disappeared in the same mysterious way."

Philip had the outer door open, when at this moment the Vicar turned in at the entrance gate. He shook hands cordially with them both.

"I have been up to Heron Dyke," spoke he ; "and have met with the usual luck—non-admittance to the Squire. I must say I think they might let him see me."

"It seems to me, sir, that they let him see nobody : for my part,

I have grown tired of calling," said the Captain. "Still, in your favour, his spiritual adviser, an exception might well be made."

"I ventured to say as much to surly old Aaron this afternoon," returned Mr. Kettle. "He refused at first point-blank, saying it was one of his master's bad days, and he was sure he would not see me. I persevered; bidding him take a message for me to the Squire; so he showed me into one of the dull old rooms—all the blinds down—while he took it in."

"And were you admitted, sir?" interposed impatient Philip, interested in the story, yet anxious to be gone.

"No, I was not, Philip. Aaron came back in a few minutes, bringing me the Squire's message of refusal. He would have liked to see me; very much; but he was in truth too poorly for it to-day; it was one of his weak days, and Jago had absolutely forbidden him to speak even to the attendants—and he sent his affectionate regards to me. So I came away: having made a fruitless errand, as usual."

"If Jago's grand curative treatment consists in shutting up the Squire from the sight of all his friends, the less he boasts of it the better," cried Philip, as he marched away. "Tiplady remarked to me the other day that he thought there must be something very queer going on up there," concluded he, turning round at the gate to say it.

Maria Kettle departed for Leamington, and the time passed on. Philip Cleeve attended well to his duties, seeming anxious to make up for past escapades. So far as The Lilacs went, no temptations assailed him, for the place was empty, Captain Lennox having joined his sister in London. No tidings could be heard of the gold snuff-box. Dr. Downes had had it cried and advertised; but without result. It might be that he had his own opinion about the loss; or it might be that he had not. During a little private conversation with Lady Cleeve, touching her state of health, she chanced to mention that she hoped Philip's future was pretty well assured. Mr. Tiplady meant to take him into partnership, and she had herself placed twelve hundred pounds to Philip's account at the bank.

"That's where the young scapegrace has drawn his money from then, for his cards and his dice, and what not," quoth the Doctor to himself. "I hope with all my heart I was mistaken—but where the dickens can the box have gone to?"

The Doctor was fain to give the box up as a bad job. He told all his friends that he should never find it again, and the less said about it the better.

In February Philip had a pleasant change. Mr. Tiplady despatched him to Norwich, to superintend certain improvements in one of its public buildings. Philip, before starting, spoke a word to the architect of the anticipated partnership; but Mr. Tiplady cut him short with a single sentence. "Time enough to talk of that, young sir."

When Philip returned from Norwich, after his few weeks' stay there, during which he had done his best and given unlimited satisfaction, he heard that Captain Lennox and Mrs. Ducie were at The Lilacs—and to Philip the town seemed to look all the brighter for their presence.

In spite of his former good resolution, he went over to call on Mrs. Ducie, went twice, neither of the times finding her at home. About this time Philip was surprised and gratified by receiving a note of invitation from Lord Camberley to attend a concert and ball at Camberley Park. Philip took the note to his mother. "My dear boy, you must go by all means," said Lady Cleeve. "This is an invitation which may lead to—to pleasant things. I am glad to find that they have not forgotten you are the son of Sir Gunton Cleeve. You have as good blood in your veins as anyone who will be there. What a pity, for your sake, dear, that we cannot live in the style we ought—to which you were born."

So Philip went to the concert and ball. Lord Camberley vouchsafed him a couple of fingers and "how d'ye do," and introduced him to his aunt, the Hon. Mrs. Featherstone. Philip sat through the concert without speaking to anybody. He was glad when it came to an end, and he made his way to the ball-room. There he met several people with whom he was, more or less, acquainted. Presently his eye caught that of Mrs. Ducie, who was sitting somewhat apart from the general crush. She beckoned him to her side and held out her hand with a frank smile.

"What a truant you are. What have you been doing with yourself all this long time?" she asked, as she made room for him to sit beside her.

Philip told her, his laughing eyes bending in admiration on her face, that he had been staying for some weeks at Norwich, and that he had twice called at The Lilacs since his return, but had not found her at home. She listened in her pretty, engaging, attentive manner.

"Do you dance?" she asked him, as another set was forming.

"I do not care to—unless you will stand up with me," he replied.

"I shall not dance to-night. Lord Camberley came up to ask me, but I said no: I told him I had sprained my foot. I do not much like Lord Camberley," she added confidentially—and Philip felt wonderfully flattered at the confidence. "I think he is random—and he is so fond of playing for high stakes at cards. I told Ferdinand the other day that I should object, were I in his place; but, as he said, it did not often happen. Ferdinand, with his income, can afford a loss occasionally; but everybody is not so fortunate."

Philip thought she looked at him with a kindly meaning as she spoke; he felt sure she held an especial interest in him, and a blush, bright and ingenuous as a schoolgirl's, rose to his face.

He sat by Mrs. Ducie a great part of the evening and took her

down to supper. Captain Lennox came up several times, and they both invited him for the following Friday evening.

When Friday evening came, and Philip found himself again at The Lilacs and knocked at the well-remembered door, it seemed to him as if the intervening weeks and all that had happened to him since his last visit were nothing more substantial than a dream.

Two or three gentlemen were at the cottage this evening whom he had not met before, but to whom he was now introduced. After a light and elegantly served supper came cards and champagne. To-night, however, Philip did not play. He read poetry to Mrs. DUCIE in a little boudoir that opened out of the drawing-room. So were woven again the bonds which at one time he believed were broken for ever. There was a strange, subtle fascination about this woman which held him almost as it were against his will. She was gracious and frank towards him, but that was all. She was gracious and frank to every gentleman who visited at the cottage. There was nothing in her manner towards Philip which would allow of his flattering himself that he was a greater favourite than anyone else whom he met there: though at moments he did think she held him in interest. He certainly did not love her—his heart was given to Maria—but Margaret DUCIE held him by an invisible chain which he was too weak to break.

That Friday evening was but the precursor of many other evenings at The Lilacs: for all the old glamour had come back over Philip. Maria was away, and the cottage was a very pleasant place. Sometimes he played cards, sometimes he did not; sometimes he won a little money, not unfrequently he lost what for him was a considerable sum. Now and then it almost seemed as if Mrs. DUCIE, compassionating his youth and inexperience, drew him away of set purpose from the card table. Be that as it may, when April came in, and Philip looked into the state of his banking account, he found to his dismay that in the course of the past few weeks he had lost upwards of a hundred pounds. How could he redeem it?

"Now's your time if you want to make a cool hundred or two," said Lennox to him a day or two later.

Philip pricked up his ears. "Who does not want to make a cool hundred or two? Only show me how."

"The thing lies in a nutshell. Back Patchwork."

"Eh?" queried Philip, who knew little more about racing and sporting matters than he did of the mysteries of Eleusis.

"Back Patchwork," reiterated the Captain with emphasis. "I am quite aware that he's not a general favourite: the odds were ten to one against him last night: there's Trumpeter and Clansman, and one or two other horses that stand before him in public estimation. But take no notice of that. Camberley and I have got the tip, no matter how, and you may rely upon it that we know pretty well what we are about. Both of us are going to lay heavily on the

horse, and if you have a few spare sovereigns you can't do better than follow our example."

The Captain spoke of an early Spring Meeting at Newmarket; and this particular race in it was exciting some interest at Nullington, for reasons which need not be detailed here. Philip, desperately anxious to replenish his diminished coffers, took the bait, though in a cautious manner, and betted twenty pounds on Patchwork. If the horse won, and Philip gained the odds, he would pocket two hundred pounds.

He grew anxious. Everybody said that either Trumpeter or Clansman would win; Patchwork was scoffed at as an outsider. Philip began to think of his twenty pounds as so much good money thrown away.

At length the day of the race arrived, and Philip awaited the result with a feverish anxiety to which his young life had hitherto been a stranger. It's true, if he lost, twenty pounds would not ruin him; but, if he won, two hundred would set him up.

At length the looked-for news reached Nullington by telegram, and a slip of paper was pasted to the window of the Rose and Crown, on which was written in large characters:—Patchwork 1.—Clansman 2.—Trumpeter 3.

Philip Cleeve fell back out of the crowd gathered there, with a great gasp of relief.

Three days later Captain Lennox placed in his hands two hundred pounds in crisp Bank of England notes. "If you had only taken my advice," he said, "and ventured fifty pounds instead of twenty, what a much richer man you would have been to-day!"

(To be continued.)



VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

SPRING sunshine, bright and warm to-day, lay on Timberdale. Herbert Tanerton, looking sick and ill, sat on a bench on the front lawn, holding an argument with his wife, shielded from outside gazers by the clump of laurel-trees. We used to say the Rector's illnesses were all fancy and temper; but it seemed to be rather more than that now. Worse tempered he was than ever; Jack's misfortunes and Jack's conduct annoyed him. During the past winter Jack had taken some employment at the Liverpool Docks, in connection with the Messrs. Freeman's ships. Goodness knew of what description it was, Herbert would say, turning up his nose.

A day or two ago Jack made his appearance again at the Rectory; had swooped down upon it without warning or ceremony, just as he had in the autumn. Herbert did not approve of that. He approved still less of the object which had brought Jack at all. Jack was tired of the Liverpool Docks; the work he had to do was not congenial to him; and he had now come to Timberdale to ask Robert Ashton to make him his bailiff. Not being able to take a farm on his own account, Jack thought the next best thing would be to take the management of one. Robert Ashton would be parting with his bailiff at midsummer, and Jack would like to drop into the post. Anything much less congenial to the Rector's notions, Jack could hardly have pitched upon.

"I can see what it is—Jack is going to be a thorn in my side for ever," the Rector was remarking to his wife, who sat near him, doing some useful work. "He never had any idea of the fitness of things. A bailiff, now!—a servant!"

"I wish you would let him take a farm, Herbert—lend him the money to stock one."

"I know you do; you have said so before."

Grace sighed. But when she had it on her conscience to say a thing she said it.

"Herbert, you know—you know I have never thought it fair that we should enjoy all the income we do; and ——"

"What do you mean by 'fair'?" interrupted Herbert. "I only enjoy my own."

"Legally it is yours. Rightly, a large portion of it ought to be Jack's. It does not do us any good, Herbert, this superfluous income; you only put it by. It does not in the slightest degree add to our enjoyment of life."

"Do be quiet, Grace—unless you can talk sense. Jack will get no money from me. He ought to be at sea. What right had he to

give it up? The *Rose of Delhi* is expected back now: let him take her again."

"You know why he will not, Herbert. And he must do something for a living. I wish you would not object to his engaging himself to Robert Ashton. If——"

"Why don't you wish anything else that's lowering and degrading? You are as devoid of common sense as he!" retorted the parson, walking away in a fume.

Matters were in this state when we got back to Crabb Cot; to stop at it for a longer or a shorter period as fate and the painters at Dyke Manor would allow. Jack urging Robert Ashton to promise him the bailiff's post — vacant the next midsummer; Herbert strenuously objecting to it; and Robert Ashton in a state of dilemma between the two. He would have liked well enough to engage John Tanerton; but he did not like to defy the Rector. When the Squire heard this later, his opinion vacillated, according to custom: now leaning to Herbert's side, now to Jack's. And the Fontaines, we found, were in all the bustle of house-moving. Their own house, Oxlip Grange, being at length ready for them, they were quitting Maythorn Bank.

"Goodness bless me!" cried the Squire, coming in at dusk from a stroll he had taken the evening of our arrival. "I never got such a turn in my life."

"What has given it you, sir?"

"What has given it me, Johnny? why, Sir Dace Fontaine. I never saw any man so changed," he went on, rubbing up his hair. "He looks like a ghost, more than a man."

"Is he ill?"

"He must be ill. Sauntering down that narrow lane by Maythorn Bank, I came upon a tall something mooning along like a walking shadow. I might have taken it for a shadow, but that it lifted its bent head, and threw its staring eyes straight into mine—and I protest that a shadowy sensation crept over myself when I recognised it for Fontaine. You never saw a face so gloomy and wan. How long is it since we saw him, Johnny?"

"About nine months I think, sir."

"The man must be suffering from a wasting complaint, or else he has some secret care that's fretting him to fiddle-strings. Mark my words, all of you, it is one or the other."

"Dear me!" put in Mrs. Todhetley, full of pity. "I always thought him a gloomy man. Did you ask him whether he was ill?"

"Not I," said the Pater: "he gave me no opportunity. Had I been a sheriff's officer with a writ in my hand he could hardly have turned off shorter. They had moved into the other house that day, he muttered, and he must lock up Maythorn Bank and be after them."

This account of Sir Dace was in a measure cleared up the next

morning. Who should come in after breakfast but the surgeon, Cole. Talking of this and that, Sir Dace Fontaine's name came up.

"I am on my way now to Sir Dace; to the new place," cried Cole. "They went into it yesterday. Might have gone in a month ago, but Sir Dace made no move to do it. He seems to have no heart left to do anything; neither heart nor energy."

"I knew he was ill," cried the Squire. "No mistaking that. And now, Cole, what is it that's the matter with him?"

"He shows symptoms of a very serious inward complaint," gravely answered Cole. "A complaint that, if it really does set in, must prove fatal. We have some hopes yet that we shall ward it off. Sir Dace does not think we shall, and is in a rare fright about himself."

"A fright, is he! That's it, then."

"Never saw any man in such a fright before," went on Cole. "Says he's going to die—and he does not want to die."

"I said last night the man was like a walking shadow. And there's a kind of scare in his face."

Cole nodded. "Two or three weeks ago I got a note from him, asking me to call. I found him something like a shadow, as you observe, Squire. The cold weather had kept him indoors, and I had not chanced to see him for some weeks. When Sir Dace told me his symptoms, I suppose I looked grave. Combined with his wasted appearance, they unpleasantly impressed me, and he took alarm. 'The truth,' he said, in his arbitrary way: 'tell me the truth; only that. Conceal nothing.' Well, when a patient adjures me in a solemn manner to tell the truth, I deem it my duty to do so," added Cole, looking up.

"Go on, Cole," cried the Squire, nodding approval.

"I told him the truth, softening it in a degree—that I did not altogether like some of the symptoms, but that I hoped, with skill and care, to get him round again. The same day he sent for Darbyshire of Timberdale, saying we must attend him conjointly, for two heads were better than one. Two days later he sent for somebody else—no other than Mr. Ben Rymer."

We all screamed out in surprise. "Ben Rymer!"

"Ay," said Cole, "Ben Rymer. Ben has got through and is a surgeon now, like the rest of us. And, upon my word, I believe the fellow has his profession thoroughly in hand. He will make a name in the world, the chances for it being afforded him, unless I am mistaken."

Something like moisture stood in the Squire's good old eyes. "If his father, poor Rymer, had but lived to see it!" he softly said. "Anxiety, touching Ben, killed him."

"So we three doctors make a pilgrimage to Sir Dace regularly every day; sometimes together, sometimes apart," added Cole.

"And, of the three of us, I believe the patient likes young Rymer best—has most confidence in him."

"Shall you cure him?"

"Well, we do not yet give up hope. If the disease does set in, it will ——"

"What?"

"Run its course quickly."

"An instant yet, Cole," cried the Squire, stopping the surgeon as he was turning away. "You have told us nothing. How does the parish get on?—and the people? How is Letsom?—and Crabb generally? Tanerton—how is he?—and Timberdale? Coming here fresh, we are thirsting for news."

Cole laughed. He knew the Pater liked gossip as much as any old woman: and the reader must understand that, as yet, we had not heard any, having reached Crabb Cot late the previous afternoon.

"There is no particular news, Squire," said he. "Letsom is well; so is Crabb. Herbert Tanerton's not well. He is in a crusty way over Jack."

"He is always in a way over something. Where is Jack?"

"Jack's here, at the Rectory; just come to it. Robert Ashton's bailiff is about to take a farm on his own account, and Jack came rushing over from Liverpool to apply for the post."

Tod, who had been too much occupied with his fishing flies to take much heed before, set up a shrill whistle at this. "How will the parson like that?" he asked.

"The parson does not like it at all. Whether he will succeed in preventing it, is another matter," concluded Cole. And, with that, he made his escape.

Close upon the surgeon's departure, Colonel Letsom came in; he had heard of our arrival. It was a pity, he said, the two brothers should be at variance. Jack wanted the post—he must make a living somehow; and the Rector was in a way over it; not quite mad, but next door to it; Ashton of course not knowing what to do between them. From that subject, he began to speak of the Fontaines.

A West Indian planter, one George Bazalgette, had been over on a visit, he said, and had spent Christmas at Maythorn Bank; his object being to induce Verena to accept him as her husband. Verena would not listen to him, and he wasted his eloquence in vain. She made no hesitation in avowing to him that her affections were buried in the grave of Edward Pym.

"Fontaine told me confidentially in London that he intended she should have Bazalgette," remarked the Squire. "It was the evening we went looking for her at that wax-work place."

"Ay; but Fontaine is changed," returned the Colonel: "all his old domineering ways are gone out of him. When Bazalgette was over here, he did not attempt even to persuade her: she must take

her own course, he said. So poor Bazalgette went back as he came—wifeless. It was a pity."

"Why?"

"Because this George Bazalgette was a nice fellow," replied Colonel Letsom. "An open-hearted, fine-looking, generous man, and desperately in love with her. Miss Verena will not readily find his compeer in a summer day's march."

"As old as Adam, I suppose, Colonel," interjected Tod.

"Yes—if you choose to put Adam's age down at three or four and thirty," laughed the Colonel, as he took his leave.

To wait many hours, once she was at Crabb, without laying in a stock of those delectable "family pills," invented by the late Thomas Rymer, would have been quite beyond the philosophy of Mrs. Todhetley. That first morning, not ten minutes after Colonel Letsom left us, taking the Squire with him, she despatched me to Timberdale for a big box of them. Tod would not come: said he had his flies to see to.

Dashing through the ravine and out on the field beyond it, I came upon Jack Tanerton. Good old Jack! The Squire had said Sir Dace was changed: I saw that Jack was. He looked taller and thinner, and the once beaming face had care upon it.

"Where are you bound for, Jack?"

"Not for any place in particular. Just sauntering about."

"Walk my way, then. I am going to Rymer's."

"It is such nonsense," cried Jack, speaking of his brother, after we had plunged a bit into affairs. "Calling it derogatory, and all the rest of it! I could be just as much of a gentleman as Ashton's bailiff as I am now. Everybody knows me. He gives a good salary, and there's a pretty house; and I have also my own small income. Alice and I and the little ones should be as happy as the day's long. If I give in to Herbert and don't take it, I don't see what I am to turn to."

"But, Jack, why do you give up the sea?" I asked. And Jack told me what he had told others: he should never take command again until he was a free man.

"Don't you think you are letting that past matter hold too great an influence over you?" I presently said. "You must be conscious of your own innocence—and yet you seem as sad and subdued as though you were guilty!"

"I am subdued because other people think me guilty!" he answered. "Changed? I am. It is that which has changed me; not the calamity itself."

"Jack, were I you, I should stand up in the face and eyes of all the world, and say to them, 'Before God, I did not kill Pym.' People would believe you then. But you don't do it."

"I have my reasons for not doing it, Johnny Ludlow. God knows what they are; He knows all things. I daresay I may be set right with the world in time: though I don't see how it is to be done."

A smart young man, a new assistant, was behind the counter at Ben Rymer's, and served me with the pills. Coming out, box in hand, we met Ben himself. I hardly knew him, he was so spruce. His fiery hair and whiskers were trimmed down to neatness and looked of a more reasonable colour; his red-brown beard was certainly handsome, and his clothes were well cut.

"Why, he has grown into a dandy, Jack," I said, after we had stood a minute or two, talking with the surgeon.

"Yes," said Jack, "he is going in for the proprieties of life now. Ben may make a gentleman yet—and a good man to boot."

That same afternoon, it chanced that the Squire met Ben Rymer. Striding along in his powerful fashion, Ben came full tilt round the sharp corner that makes the turning to the Islip Road, and nearly ran over the Pater. Ben had been to Oxlip Grange.

"So, sir," cried the Pater, stopping him, "I hear you are in practice now, and intend to become a respectable man. It's time you did."

"Ay, at last," replied Ben good-humouredly. "It is a long lane, Squire, that has no turning."

"Don't you lapse back again, Mr. Ben?"

"Not if I know it, sir. I hope I shall not."

"It was anxiety on your score, you know, that troubled your good father's mind in dying."

"If it did not bring his death on," readily conceded Ben, his light tone changing. "I know it all, Squire—and have felt it."

"Look here," cried the Squire, catching at Ben's button-hole, which had a lovely lily-of-the-valley in it, "there was nothing on earth your poor patient father prayed for so earnestly as for your welfare; that you might be saved for time and eternity. Now I don't believe such prayers are ever lost. So you will be helped on your way if you bear steadfastly onwards."

Giving the young man's hand a wring, the Squire turned off on his way. In half a minute he was back again.

"Hey, Mr. Benjamin!—here. How is Sir Dace Fontaine? I suppose you have just left him?"

So Ben had to come back at the call. To the Pater's surprise he saw his eyes were moist.

"He is worse, sir, to-day; palpably worse."

"Will he get over it?"

Ben gave his head an emphatic shake, which somehow belied his words: "Cole and Darbyshire think there is hope yet, Squire."

"And you do not; that's evident. Well, good-day."

II.

THE next move in this veritable drama was the appearance of Alice Tanerton and her six-months-old baby at Timberdale. Looking upon

the Rectory as almost her home—it had been Jack's for many years of his life—Alice came to it without the ceremony of invitation: the object of her coming now being to strive to induce Herbert to let her husband engage himself to Robert Ashton. And this visit of Alice's was destined to bring about a most extraordinary event.

One Wednesday evening when Jack and his wife were dining with us—and that troublesome baby, which Alice could not, as it seemed, stir abroad without, was in the nursery squealing—Alice chanced to say that she had to go to Islip the following day, her mother having charged her to see John Paul the lawyer, concerning a little property that she, Aunt Dean, held in Crabb. It would be a tremendously long walk for Alice from Timberdale, especially as she was not looking strong, and Mrs. Todhetley proposed that I should drive her over in the pony-carriage: which Alice jumped at.

Accordingly, the next morning, which was warm and bright, I took the pony-carriage to the Rectory, picked up Alice, and then drove back towards Islip. As we passed Oxlip Grange, which lay in our way, Sir Dace Fontaine was outside in the road, slowly pacing the side-path. I thought I had never seen a man look so ill: so *down* and gloomy. He raised his eyes, as we came up, to give me a nod. I was nodding back again, when Alice screamed out and startled me. She started the pony too, which sprang on at a tangent.

"Johnny! Johnny Ludlow!" she gasped, her face whiter than death and her lips trembling like an aspen leaf, "did you see that man? Did you see him?"

"Yes. I was nodding to him. What is the matter?"

"It was the man I saw in my dream: the man who had committed the murder in it."

I stared at her, wondering whether she had lost her wits.

"Do you remember the description I gave of that man?" she continued, in excitement. "I do. I wrote it down at the time, and Mr. Todhetley holds it, sealed up. Every word, every particular is in my memory now, as I saw him in my dream. 'A tall, evil-looking, dark man in a long brown coat, who walked with his eyes fixed on the ground.' I tell you, Johnny Ludlow, *that is the man.*"

Her vehemence infected me. I looked round after Sir Dace. He was turning this way now. Certainly the description seemed like enough. His countenance just now did look an evil one; and he was tall and he was dark, and he wore a long brown coat this morning, nearly reaching to his heels, and his eyes were fixed on the ground as he walked.

"But what if his looks do tally with the man you saw in your dream, Alice? What of it?"

"What of it!" she echoed, vehemently. "What of it! Why, don't you see, Johnny Ludlow? This man must have killed Edward Pym."

"Hush, Alice ! It is impossible. This is Sir Dace Fontaine."

"I do not care who he is," was her impulsive retort. "As surely as that Heaven is above us, Edward Pym got his death at the hand of this man. My dream revealed it to me."

I might as well have tried to stem a torrent as to argue with her ; so I drove on and held my tongue. Arrived at the office of Paul and Chandler, I following her in, leaving a boy with the pony outside. Alice pounced upon old Paul with the assertion : Sir Dace Fontaine was the evil and guilty man she had seen in her dream. Considering that Paul was a sort of cousin to Sir Dace's late wife, this was pretty well. Old Paul stared at her as I had done. Her cheeks were hectic, her eyes wildly earnest. She recalled to the lawyer's memory the dream she had related to him ; she asserted in the most unqualified manner that Dace Fontaine was guilty. Tom Chandler, who was old Paul's partner and had married his daughter Emma, came into the room in the middle of it, and took his share of staring.

"It must be investigated," said Alice to them. "Will you undertake it ?"

"My dear young lady, one cannot act upon a fancy—a dream," cried old Paul : and there was a curious sound of compassionate pity in his voice, which betrayed to Alice the gratifying fact that he was regarding her as a monomaniac.

"If you will not act, others will," she concluded at last, after exhausting her arguments in vain. And she came away with me in resentment, having totally forgotten all about her mother's business.

To Crabb Cot then—she *would* go—to take counsel with the Squire. He told her to her face she was worse than a lunatic to suspect Sir Dace ; and he would hardly get out the sealed packet at all. It was opened at last, and the dream, as written down in it by herself at the time, read.

"John Tanerton, my husband, was going to sea in command," it began. "He came to me the morning of the day they were to sail, looking very patient, pale and sorrowful : more so than anyone, I think, could look in life. He and I seemed to have had some estrangement the previous night that was not remembered by either of us now, and I, for one, repented of it. Somebody was murdered (though I could not tell how this had been revealed to me), some man ; Jack was suspected by all people, but they could not bring it home to him. We were in some strange town ; strangers in it ; though I, as it seemed to me, had been in it once, many years before. All this while, Jack was standing before me in his sadness and sorrow, mutely appealing to me, as it seemed, to clear him. Everybody was talking of it and glancing at us askance, everybody shunned us, and we were in cruel distress. Suddenly I remembered that when I was in the town before, the man now murdered had had a bitter quarrel with another man, a gentleman of note in the town ; and a conviction came over me, powerful as a revelation, that it was

he who had now committed the murder. I left Jack, and told this to someone connected with the ship, its owner, I think. He laughed at the words, saying that the gentleman I would accuse was of high authority in the town, one of its first magnates. That he had done it, however high he might be, I felt perfectly certain ; but nobody would listen to me, nobody would heed so improbable a tale : and, in the trouble this brought me, I awoke. *Such trouble ! Nothing like it could be felt in real life.*

“ That was dream the first.

“ I lay awake for some little time thinking of it, and then went to sleep again : and this was dream the second.

“ The dream seemed to recommence from where it had left off. It was afternoon. I was in a large open carriage, going through the streets of the town, the ship's owner (as I say I think he was) sitting beside me. In passing over a bridge we saw two gentlemen walking towards us arm-in-arm on the foot-path, one of them an officer in a dusky old red uniform and cocked hat, the other a tall, evil-looking, dark man, who wore a long brown coat and kept his eyes on the ground. Though I had never seen him in my life before, I knew it was the guilty man ; he had killed the other, committed the crime in secret : but ere I could speak, he who was sitting with me said, ‘ There's the gentleman you would have accused this morning. He stands before everybody else in the town. Fancy your accusing *him* of such a thing ! ’ It seemed to me that I did not answer, could not answer for the pain. That he was guilty I knew, and not Jack, but I had no means of bringing it home to him. He and the man in uniform walked on in their secure immunity, and I went on in the carriage in my pain. The pain awoke me.

“ And now it only remains for me to declare that I have set down this singular dream truthfully, word for word ; and I shall seal it up and keep it. It may be of use if any trouble falls upon Jack, as the dream seems to foretell—and of some trouble in store for him he has already felt the shadow. So strangely vivid a dream, and the intense pain it brought and leaves with me, can hardly have visited me for nothing.—ALICE TANERTON.”

That was all the paper said. The Squire poring his good old spectacles over it, shook his head as Alice pointed out the description of the guilty man, how exactly it tallied with the appearance of Sir Dace Fontaine ; but he only repeated Paul the lawyer's words, “ One cannot act upon a dream.”

“ It was Sir Dace ; it was Sir Dace,” reiterated Alice, clasping her hands piteously. “ I am as sure of it as that I hope to go to Heaven.” And I drove her home in the belief.

There ensued a commotion. Not a commotion to be told to the parish, but a private one amidst ourselves. I never saw a woman in such a fever of excitement as Alice Tanerton was in from that day, or anyone take up a matter so warmly.

Captain Tanerton did not adopt her views. He shook his head, and said Sir Dace it *could not* have been. Sir Dace was at his house in the Marylebone Road at the very hour the calamity happened off Tower Hill. I followed suit, bearing out Jack's word. Was I not at the Marylebone Road that evening myself, playing chess with Coralie?—and was not Sir Dace shut up in his library all the time, and never came out of it?

Alice listened, and looked puzzled to death. But she held to her own opinion. And when a fit of desperate obstinacy takes possession of a woman without rhyme or reason, you cannot shake it. As good try to argue with the whistling wind. She did not pretend to see how it could have been, she said, but Sir Dace was guilty. And she haunted Paul and Chandler's office at Islip, praying them to take the matter up.

At length, to soothe her, and perhaps to prevent her carrying it elsewhere, they promised they would. And of course they had to make some show of doing it.

One evening Tom Chandler came to Crabb Cot and asked to see me alone. "I want you to tell me all the particulars you remember of that fatal night," he began, when I went to him in the Squire's little room. "I have taken down Captain Tanerton's testimony, and I must have yours, Johnny."

"But, are you going to stir in it?"

"We must do something, I suppose. Paul thinks so. I am going to London to-morrow on other matters, and shall use the opportunity to make an enquiry or two. It is rather a strange piece of business altogether," added Mr. Chandler, as he took his place at the table and drew the inkstand towards him. "John Tanerton is innocent. I feel sure of that."

"How strongly Mrs. Tanerton has taken it up!"

"Pretty well for that," answered Tom Chandler, a smile on his good-natured face. "She told us yesterday in the office that it must be the consciousness of guilt which has worried Sir Dace to a skeleton. Now then, we'll begin."

He dotted down my answers to his questions, also what I voluntarily added. Then he took a sheet of paper from his pocket, closely written upon, and compared its statements—they were Tanerton's—with mine. Putting his finger on the paper to mark a place, he looked at me.

"Did Sir Dace speak of Pym or of Captain Tanerton that night, when you were playing chess with Miss Fontaine?"

"Sir Dace did not come into the drawing-room. He had left the dinner-table in a huff to shut himself up in his library, Miss Fontaine said; and he stayed in it."

"Then you did not see Sir Dace at all that night?"

"Oh yes, later—when Captain Tanerton and young Saxby came up to tell him of the death. We then all went down to Ship Street together. You have taken that down."

"True," said Chandler. "Well, I cannot make much out of it as it stands," he concluded, folding the papers and putting them in his pocket-book. "What do you say is the number of the house in the Marylebone Road?"

I told him, and he went away, wishing he could accept my offer of staying to drink tea with us.

"Look here, Chandler," I said to him at the front door: "why don't you take down Sir Dace Fontaine's evidence, as well as mine and Tanerton's?"

"I have done it," he answered. "I was with Sir Dace to-day. Mrs. Tanerton's suspicions are of course—absurd," he added, making a pause, as if at a loss for a suitable word; "but for her peace of mind, poor lady, we would like to pitch upon the right individual if we can. And as yet he seems to be a myth."

The good ship, *Rose of Delhi*, came gaily into port, and took up her berth in St. Katharine's Docks as before; for she had been chartered for London. Her owners, the Freemans, wrote at once from Liverpool to Captain Tanerton, begging him to resume command. Jack wrote back, and declined.

How is it that whispers get about? Do the birds in the air carry them?—or the winds of Heaven? In some cases it seems impossible that anything else can have done it. Paul and Chandler, John Tanerton and his wife, the Squire and myself: we were the only people cognisant of the new suspicion that Alice was striving to cast on Sir Dace; one and all of us had kept silent lips: and yet, the rumour got abroad. Sir Dace Fontaine was accused of knowing more about Pym's death than he ought to know, and Tom Chandler was in London for the purpose of investigating it. This might not have mattered very much for ordinary ears, but it reached those of Sir Dace.

Coralie Fontaine heard it from Mary Ann Letsom. In Mary Ann's indignation at the report, she spoke it out to Coralie; and Coralie, laughing at the absurdity of the thing, repeated it to Sir Dace. How he received it, or what he said about it, did not transpire.

A stagnant kind of atmosphere seemed to hang over us just then, like the heavy, unnatural calm that precedes the storm. Sir Dace got weaker day by day, more of a shadow; Herbert Tanerton and his brother were still at variance, so far as Jack's future was concerned; and Mr. Chandler seemed to have taken up his abode in London for good.

"Does he *never* mean to come back?" demanded Alice one day of the Squire: and her lips and cheeks were red with fever as she asked it. The truth was, that some cause of Paul and Chandler's then on at Westminster was prolonging itself out—even when it did begin—unconscionably.

One morning I met Ben Rymer as he was leaving Oxlip Grange. Coralie Fontaine had walked with him to the gate, talking earnestly, their two heads together. Ben shook hands with her and came out, looking as grave as a judge.

"How is Sir Dace?" I asked him. "Getting on?"

"Getting off," responded Ben. "For that's what it will be now; and not long first, unless he mends."

"Is he worse?"

"He is nearly as bad as he can be, to be alive. And yesterday he must needs go careering off to Islip by himself to transact some business with Paul the lawyer! He was no more fit for it than—than *this* is," concluded Ben, giving a flick to his silk umbrella as he marched off. Ben went in for silk umbrellas now: in the old days a cotton one would have been too good for him.

"I am so sorry to hear Sir Dace is no better," I said to Coralie Fontaine, who had waited at the gate to speak to me.

Coralie shook her head. Some deep feeling sat in her generally passive face: the tears stood in her eyes.

"Thank you, Johnny Ludlow. It is very sad. I feel sure Mr. Rymer has given up all hope, though he does not say so to me. Verena looks nearly as ill as papa. I wish we had never come to Europe!"

"Sir Dace exerts himself too greatly, Mr. Rymer says."

"Yes; and worries himself also. As if his affairs needed as much as a thought!—I am sure they must be just as straight and smooth as yonder green plain. He had to see Mr. Paul yesterday about some alteration in his will, and went to Islip, instead of sending for Paul here. I thought he would have died when he got home. Papa has a strange restlessness upon him. Good-bye, Johnny. I'd ask you to come in but that things are all so miserable."

III.

IT was late in the evening, getting towards bed-time. Mrs. Todhetley had gone upstairs with the face-ache, Tod was over at old Coney's, and I and the Squire were sitting alone, when Thomas surprised us by showing in Tom Chandler. We did not know he was back from London.

"Yes, I got back this evening," said he, as he sat down near the lamp, and spread some papers out on the table. "I am in a bit of a dilemma, Mr. Todhetley; and I am come here at this late hour to put it before you."

Chandler's voice had dropped to a mysterious whisper; his eyes were glancing at the door to make sure it was shut. The Squire pushed up his spectacles and drew his chair nearer. I sat on the opposite side, wondering what was coming.

"That suspicion of Alice Tanerton's—that Sir Dace killed Pym," went on Chandler, his left hand resting on the papers, his eyes on the Squire's. "I think it was a true one."

"A what?" cried the Pater.

"A true one. That Sir Dace did kill him."

"Goodness bless me!" gasped the Squire, his good old face taking a lighter tint. "What on earth do you mean, man?"

"Well, I mean just that," answered Chandler. "And I feel myself to be, in consequence, in an uncommonly awkward position. One can't well accuse Sir Dace, a man close upon the grave; and Paul's relative in addition. And yet, Captain Tanerton must be cleared."

"I can't make top or tail of what you mean, Tom Chandler!" cried the Squire, blinking like a bewildered owl. "Don't you think you are dreaming?"

"Wish I was," said Tom, "so far as this business goes. Look here. I'll begin at the beginning and go through the story. You'll understand it then."

"It's more than I do now. Or Johnny, either. Look at him!"

"When Mrs. John Tanerton brought to us that accusation of Sir Dace, on the strength of her dream," began Chandler, after glancing at me, "I thought she must have turned a little crazy. It was a singular dream; there's no denying that; and the exact resemblance to Sir Dace Fontaine of the man she saw in it, was still more singular: so much so, that I could not help being impressed by it. Another thing that strongly impressed me, was Captain Tanerton's testimony: from the moment I heard it and weighed his manner in giving it, I felt sure of his innocence. Revolving these matters in my own mind, I resolved to go to Sir Dace and get him to give me his version of the affair; not in the least endorsing in my own mind her suspicion of him, or hinting at it to him, you understand; simply to get more evidence. I went to Sir Dace, heard what he had to say, and brought away with me a most unpleasant doubt."

"That he was guilty?"

"That he might be. His manner was so confused, himself so agitated when I first spoke. His hands trembled, his lips grew white. He strove to turn it off, saying I had startled him, but I felt a very queer doubt arising in my mind. His narrative had to be drawn from him; it was ~~anything~~ but clear, and full of contradictions. 'Why do you come to me about this?' he asked: 'have you heard anything?' 'I only come to ask you for information,' was my answer: 'Mrs. John Tanerton wants the matter looked into. If her husband is not guilty, he ought to be cleared in the face of the world.' 'Nobody thinks he was guilty,' retorted Sir Dace in a shrill tone of annoyance. 'Nobody was guilty: Pym must have fallen and injured himself.' I came away from the interview, as I tell you, with my doubts very unpleasantly stirred," resumed Chandler;

"and it caused me to be more earnest in looking after odds and ends of evidence in London than I otherwise might have been."

"Did you pick up any?"

"Ay, I did. I turned the people at the Marylebone lodgings inside out, so to say; I found out a Mrs. Ball, where Verena Fontaine had hidden herself; and I quite haunted Dame Richenough's in Ship Street, Tower Hill. There I met with Mark Ferrar. A piece of good fortune, for he told me something that ——"

"What was it?" gasped the Squire, eagerly.

"Why this—and a most important piece of evidence it is. That night, not many minutes before the fatal accident must have occurred, Ferrar saw Sir Dace Fontaine in Ship Street, watching Pym's room. He was standing in an entry on the opposite side of the street, gazing across at Pym's. This, you perceive, disproves one fact testified to—that Sir Dace spent that evening shut up in his library at home. Instead of that he was absolutely down on the spot."

The Squire rubbed his face like a helpless man. "Why could not Ferrar have said so at the time?" he asked.

"Ferrar attached no importance to it; he thought Sir Dace was but looking over to see whether his daughter was at Pym's. But Ferrar had no opportunity of giving testimony: he sailed away the next morning in the ship. Nothing could exceed his astonishment when I told him in London that Captain Tanerton lay under the suspicion. He has taken Crabb on his way to Worcester to support this testimony if needful, and to impart it privately to Tanerton."

"Well, it all seems a hopeless puzzle to me," returned the Pater. "Why on earth did not Jack speak out more freely, and say he was not guilty?"

"I don't know. The fact, that Sir Dace did go out that night," continued Chandler, "was confirmed by one of the maids in the Marylebone Road—Maria; a smart girl with curled hair. She says Sir Dace had not been many minutes in the library that night, to which he went straight from the dinner-table in a passion, when she saw him leave it again, catch up his hat with a jerk as he passed through the hall, and go out at the front door. It was just after Ozias had been to ask him whether he would take some coffee, and got sent away with a flea in his ear. Whether or not Sir Dace came in during the evening, Maria does not know; he may, or may not, have done so; but she did see him come home in a cab at ten o'clock, or soon after it. She was gossiping with the maids at a house some few doors off, when a cab stopped near to them; Sir Dace got out of it, paid the man, and walked on to his own door. Maria supposed the driver had made a mistake in the number. So you see there can be no doubt that Sir Dace was out that night."

"He was certainly in soon after ten," I remarked. "Verena came home about that time, and she saw him downstairs."

"Don't you bring *her* name up, Johnny," corrected the Squire.

"That young woman led to all the mischief. Running away, as she did—and sending us off to that wax-work show in search of her! Fine figures they cut, some of those dumb things!"

"I found also," resumed Chandler, turning over his papers, on which he had looked from time to time, "that Sir Dace met with one or two slight personal mishaps that night. He sprained his wrist, accounting for it the next morning by saying he had slipped in getting into bed; and he lost a little piece out of his shirt-front."

"Out of his shirt-front!"

"Just here," and Chandler touched the middle button of his shirt. "The button-hole and a portion of the linen round it had been torn away. Nothing would have been known of that but for the laundress. She brought the shirt back before putting it into water, lest it should be said she had done it in the washing. Maria remembered this, and told me. A remarkably intelligent girl, that."

"Did Maria—I remember the girl—suspect anything?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing whatever. She does not now; I accounted otherwise for my enquiries. Altogether, what with these facts I have told you, and a few minor items, and Ferrar's evidence, I can draw but one conclusion—that Sir Dace Fontaine killed Pym."

"I never heard such a strange thing!" cried the Pater. "And what's to be done?"

"That's the question," said Chandler. "What *is* to be done?" And he left us with the doubt.

Well, it turned out to be quite true; but I have not space here to go more into detail. Sir Dace Fontaine was guilty, and the dream was a true dream.

"Did you suspect him?" the Squire asked privately of Jack, who was taken into counsel the next day.

"No, I never suspected Sir Dace," Jack answered. "I suspected someone else—Verena."

"No!"

"I did. About half-past eight o'clock that night, Ferrar had seen a young lady—or somebody dressed as one—watching Pym's house from the opposite entry: just where, it now appears, he later saw Sir Dace. Ferrar thought it was Verena Fontaine. A little later, in fact just after the calamity must have occurred, Alfred Saxby also saw a young lady running from the direction of the house, whom he also took to be Verena. Ferrar and I came to the same conclusion—I don't know about Saxby—that Verena must have been present when it happened. I thought that, angry at the state Pym was in, she might have given him a push in her vexation, perhaps inadvertently, and that he fell. Who knew?"

"But Verena was elsewhere that evening, you know; at a concert."

"I knew she said so; but I did not believe it. Of course I know

now that both Ferrar and Saxby were mistaken ; that it was somebody else they saw, who bore, one must imagine, some general resemblance to her."

" Well, I think you might have known better," cried the Squire.

" Yes, I suppose I ought to. But, before the inquest had terminated, I chanced to be alone with Verena ; and her manner —nay, her words, two or three she said—seemed to imply her guilt, and also a consciousness that I must be aware of it. I had no doubt at all from that hour."

" And is it for that reason, consideration for her, that you have partially allowed suspicion to rest upon yourself ? " pursued the Squire, hotly.

" Of course. How could I be the means of throwing it upon a defenceless girl ? "

" Well, John Tanerton, you are a chivalrous goose ! "

" Verena must have known the truth all along."

" That's not probable," contended the Squire. " And Chandler wants to know what is to be done."

" Nothing at all, that I can see," answered Jack. " Sir Dace is not in a condition to have trouble thrown upon him."

Good Jack ! generous Jack ! There are not many such self-denying spirits in the world.

And what would have been done is beyond guessing, had Sir Dace not solved the difficulty himself. Solved it by dying.

But I must first tell of a little matter that happened. Although we had heard what we had, one could not treat the man cavalierly, and the Squire—just as good at heart as Jack—went up to make enquiries at Oxlip Grange, as usual. One day he and Colonel Letsom strolled up together, and were asked to walk in. Sir Dace wished to see them.

" If ever you saw a living skeleton, it's what he is," cried the Squire to us when he came home. " It is in the nature of the disease, I believe, that he should be. Dress him up in his shroud, and you'd take him for nothing but bones."

Sir Dace was in the easy-chair by his bed-room fire, Coralie sitting with him. By his side stood a round table with papers and letters upon it.

" I am glad you have chanced to call," he said to them, as he sent Coralie away. " I wanted my signature witnessed by someone in influential authority. You are both county magistrates."

" The signature to your will," cried the Squire, falling to that conclusion.

" Not my will," answered Sir Dace. " That is settled."

He turned to the table, his long, emaciated, trembling fingers singling out a document that lay upon it. " This is a declaration," he said, " which I have written out myself, being of sound mind, you perceive, and which I wish to sign in your presence. I testify that

every word written in it is truth ; I, a dying man, swear that it is so, before God."

His shaky hands scrawled his signature, Dace Fontaine ; and the Squire and Colonel Letsom added theirs to it. Sir Dace then sealed up the paper, and made them each affix his seal also. He then tottered to a cabinet standing by the bed's head, and locked it up in it.

" You will know where to find it when I am gone," he said. " I wish someone of you to read it aloud, after the funeral, to those assembled here. When my will shall have been read, then read this."

On the third day after this, at evening, Sir Dace Fontaine died. We heard no more about anything until the day of the funeral, which took place on the following Monday. Sir Dace left a list of those he wished invited to it, and they went. Sir Robert Tenby, Mr. Brandon, Colonel Letsom and his eldest son ; the parsons of Timberdale, Crabb, and Islip ; the three doctors who had attended him ; old Paul and Tom Chandler ; Captain Tanerton, and ourselves.

He was buried at Islip, by his own directions. And when we got back to the Grange, after leaving him in the cold churchyard, Mr. Paul read out the will. Coralie and Verena sat in the room in their deep mourning. Coralie's eyes were dry, but Verena sobbed incessantly.

Apart from a few legacies, one of which was to his servant Ozias, his property was left to his two daughters, in equal shares. The chief legacy, a large one, was left to John Tanerton—three thousand pounds. You should have seen Jack's face of astonishment as he heard it. Herbert looked as if he could not believe his ears. And Verena glanced across at Jack with a happy flush.

" Papa charged me, just before he died, to say that a sealed paper of his would be found in his private cabinet, which was to be read out now," spoke Coralie, in the pause which ensued, as old Paul's voice ceased. " He said Colonel Letsom and Mr. Todhetley would know where to find it," she added ; breaking down with a sob.

The paper was fetched, and old Paul was requested to read it. So he broke the seals.

You may have guessed what it was : a declaration of his guilt—if guilt it could be called. In a straightforward manner he stated the particulars of that past night : and the following is a summary of them.

Sir Dace went out again that night after dinner, not in secret, or with any idea of secrecy ; it simply chanced, he supposed, that no one saw him go. He was too uneasy about Verena to rest ; he fully believed her to be with Pym ; and he went down to Ship Street. Before entering the street he dismissed the cab, and proceeded cautiously to reconnoitre, believing that if he were seen, Pym would be capable of concealing Verena. After looking about till he was tired,

he took up his station opposite Pym's lodgings—which seemed to be empty—and stayed, watching, until close upon nine o'clock, when he saw Pym enter them. Before he had time to go across, the landlady began to close the shutters; while she was doing it, Captain Tanerton came up, and went in. Captain Tanerton came out in a minute or two, and walked quickly back up the street: he, Sir Dace, would have gone after him to ask him whether Verena was indoors with Pym, or not, but the Captain's steps were too fleet for him. Sir Dace then crossed over, opened the street door, and entered Pym's parlour. A short, sharp quarrel ensued. Pym was in liquor, and—consequently—insolent. In the heat of passion Sir Dace—he was a strong man then—seized Pym's arm, and shook him. Pym flew at him in return like a tiger, twisted his wrist round, and tore his shirt. Sir Dace was furious then; he struck him a powerful blow on the head—behind the ear no doubt, as the surgeons testified afterwards—and Pym fell. Leaving him there, Sir Dace quitted the house quietly, never glancing at the thought that the blow could be fatal. But, when seated in a cab on the way home, the idea suddenly occurred to him—what if he had killed Pym? The conviction, though he knew not why, or wherefore, that he had killed him, took hold of him, and he went into his house, a terrified man. The rest was known, the manuscript went on to say. He allowed people to remain in the belief that he had not been out of doors that night: though how bitterly he repented not having declared the truth at the time, none could know, save God. He now, a dying man, about to appear before that God, who had been full of mercy to him, declared that this was the whole truth, and he further declared that he had no intention whatever of injuring Pym; all he thought was, to knock him down for his insolence. He hoped the world would forgive him, though he had never forgiven himself; and he prayed his daughters to forgive him, especially Verena. He would counsel her to return to the West Indies, and marry George Bazalgette.

That ended the declaration: and an astounding surprise it must have been to most of the eager listeners. But not one ventured to make any comment on it, good or bad. The legacy to John Tanerton was understood now. Verena crossed the room as we were filing out, and put her two hands into his.

"I have had a dreadful fear upon me that it was papa," she whispered to him, the tears running down her cheeks. "Nay, worse than a fear: a conviction. I think you have had the same, Captain Tanerton, and that you have generously done your best to screen him; and I thank you with my whole heart."

"But, indeed," began Jack—and pulled himself up, short.

"Let me tell you all," said Verena. "I saw papa come in that night: I mean to our lodgings in the Marylebone Road, so I knew he had been out. It was just past ten o'clock; Ozias saw him too—but he is silent and faithful. I did not want papa to see me; fate, I

suppose, made me back into that little room, papa's library, until he should have gone upstairs. He did not go up; he came into the room: and I hid myself behind the window curtain. I cannot describe to you how strange papa looked; *dreadful*; and he groaned and flung up his arms as one does in despair. It frightened me so much that I said nothing to anybody. Still I had not the key to it: I thought it must be about me: and the torn shirt—for I saw that, and saw him button his coat over it—I supposed he had, himself, done accidentally. I drew one of the glass-doors softly open, got out that way, and up to the drawing-room. Then you came in with the news of Edward's death. At first, for a day or so, I thought as others did—that suspicion lay on you. But, gradually, all these facts impressed themselves on my mind in their startling reality; and I felt, I saw, it could have been no other than he—my poor father. Oh, Captain Tanerton, forgive him! Forgive me!"

"There's nothing to forgive; I am sorry it has come out now," whispered Jack, deeming it wise to leave it at that, and he stooped and gave her the kiss of peace.

So this was the end of it. Of the affair which had so unpleasantly puzzled the world, and tried Jack.

Jack, loyal, honest-hearted Jack, shook hands with everybody, giving a double shake to Herbert's, and went forthwith down to Liverpool.

"I will take the *Rose of Delhi* again, now," he said to the Freemans. "For this next voyage, at any rate."

"And for many a one after it, we hope, Captain Tanerton," was their warm answer. And Jack and his bright face went direct from the office to New Brighton, to tell Aunt Dean.

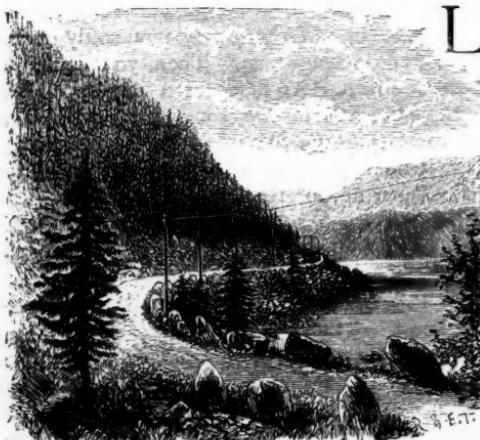
And what became of the Miss Fontaines, you would like to ask? Well, I have not time at present to tell you about Coralie; I don't know when I shall have. But, if you'll believe me, Verena took her father's advice, sailed back over the seas, and married George Bazalgette.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."



ON THE ROAD TO LAERDAL.

LAERDALSORÉN, at the head of the Sogne Fjord, is quite an important little town for Norway, but in England would be thought little more than a village. Its aspect is that of a hamlet surrounded by high mountains, which press so closely on the one side that a sense of suffocation quickly follows upon arrival, and a sojourn of several days becomes almost intolerable. Few people

stay beyond one night, so that a constant stream of visitors is in motion. A small stream, it is true, since Norway is amongst the comparatively unvisited countries of the earth. Nevertheless, it is so by comparison only. As a matter of fact, during the few available months of the year, Norway finds its worshippers, and they are as many as need be.

Laerdalsörén, or Laerdal, as it is indifferently called, has some 800 inhabitants. A quaint, old-fashioned place, the houses all built of wood; the one street straggling, long, and narrow, with small byways leading round to the cottages and huts facing the fjord: tenements, some of them, that look ancient and in the last stage of consumption, for the most part inhabited by the boatmen and fishermen of the district. Beyond these settlements the grand waters of the Sogne Fjord open out. On either side rise the mountains, massive and frowning, full of majesty and splendour. As you gaze, impatience seizes upon you to quit the small, confined village, launch out upon those waters, round those great bulwarks of nature, and make acquaintance with what lies beyond.

Yet I doubt whether this was precisely our case the night we reached Laerdal. Our four days' incessant journeying had been full of novelty and enjoyment: but the truth of the old saying,

"Be moderate in all things," cannot be disputed. We had descended lower and lower into the valley, until the mountains expanded and the stream widened and yielded up its life to the fjord, and we found ourselves in the plain, on a level with the far-off sea—for the Sogne Fjord stretches 120 miles up into the land.

We soon reached the church and the first of the straggling houses forming the town ; passed the post and telegraph office—always a welcome sight in these remote parts as a connecting link with civilization—and in a few moments were at Lindström's hotel, and in clover. Our present quarters were luxurious ; a well-furnished double sitting-room containing a fine-toned piano ; and beyond, a dining-room—well supplied with white bread ! When A. caught sight of the latter—we had seen none since leaving Christiania—I trembled for his reason : for the day of reckoning : for the task that lay before the bread maker.

The landlord spoke tolerable English ; spoke it better than he understood it : for he often interpreted what was said to him à tort et à travers, and had an uncomfortable way of answering Yes or No at random ; trusting to chance to be right or wrong, and, of course, seldom with a happy result. One slight incident was rather amusing, and proved how easily people may blunder who do not understand each other.

I wished to arrange for a boat to take us the next morning to Aardal, but the landlord had disappeared. In the passage was a stout old dame, the landlord's mother, who knew not a word of English. In answer to a request for her son, she placed her arms a-kimbo, fell a-musing for a moment, and then rushing off as fast as her size permitted, brought back in triumph a tobacco-jar. An interesting object, no doubt, but not exactly what was then required.

We laughed at what she now comprehended was a misapprehension. The request was repeated, and, yet more, the owner of the place was indicated by signs as well as words. Light broke upon her.

"A—h ! Ja ! ja ! Now she knew !" And disappearing through a doorway—which Nature forced her to take sideways, like a crab—she returned in a twinkling, out of breath, but full of self-congratulation at her intelligence, and presented me with a matchbox and a sounding "Vor so got !"

I gave up in despair, but, not to damp her ardour, accepted the matchbox. Almost at the same moment the landlord reappeared, the difficulty was over, and our wants were made known. In a short time he informed us that he had arranged for a boat and three rowers to be at our disposal at eight o'clock the next morning. It was at least a four hours' row to Aardal.

Remembering the late passage-at-arms with the old lady, I enquired of Herr Lindström the Norwegian word for landlord. He misunderstood the question, thought I asked for the name of the landlord at Aardal, and replied "Klingenberg."

"Klingenberg," I returned, wondering what could be its derivation. "A strange word for landlord."

"Very strange," answered Herr Lindström, yet looking as if he thought the strangeness all on my side. But, never doubting, I accepted the lesson. This, too, presently gave rise to sundry cross-questions and crooked answers.

The wild mountains were so close to the inn as to overshadow it, and seemed to crush upon us. Several small waterfalls trickled down the sides immediately before us, like silvery threads, making music as they ran—rather too much music when it came to the silent hours of the night. Yet the next morning arrived only too soon. But with the excitement of new scenes energy revived. At eight o'clock the boatmen were waiting at the door of the inn, and we started on our way to the Vettifos, one of the great waterfalls and wonders of Norway. It goes under different names—the Vettifos, the Vettisfos, the Mörkfos, and the Mörkavettifos.

We passed down the straggling street, found the boat at the shores of the fjord, and were soon out upon the deep waters. The men, knowing what was before them, began, continued, and ended their work in an especially calm and leisurely manner, that slightly taxed one's patience. Yet we made way, surely if slowly, and found that Laerdal was beginning to grow less distinct, until it looked no more than a small colony of fishermen's huts at the head of the fjord; a handful of tenements dwarfed to the size of toy houses and Noah's arks by the surrounding heights. At length we turned an angle and it was lost to sight. *

We were now surrounded by gloomy mountains, wild, barren, and severe, towering in all directions, diversified in outline, and full of majestic grandeur. Before us, a vast expanse of water, like an immense lake, calm and tranquil, its dark green, almost black tinge, telling of immense and cruel depths.

For upwards of four hours we were rowing amidst such scenes, varied only by an occasional fir-clad hill, and tiny house on the mountain slope, where men were chopping and stacking wood; singing a song the while, which went ringing across the water, and seemed to startle by its merriment all the surrounding silence and gloom. Often, for long together not a sound broke the stillness, save the measured dip of the oars, as the men, leisurely as ever, carried us onward.

To avoid the tide they hugged the shore in many places, and at one time came upon one of the small settlements—the little house on the slope, surrounded by pines, and the men chopping wood. This was a favourable moment for a rest. An animated conversation ensued in a language that seemed a pot-pourri of Chinese and chopsticks (this is not meant for a pun, reader), and away we shot again; leaving the choppers to their work—and how remote from the world!

So at last another turn brought us in sight of Aardal. Here

Nature had put on a more smiling mood ; and, as we neared, disclosed a small colony of picturesque houses with red roofs and green shutters ; a church with a quaint little spire—all surrounded by sloping hills, smiling and fertile ; a picture of quiet prosperity, of tranquillity and repose, such as they who live out in the great bustling world of life dream of, perhaps, but know not. A small pier shot out into the water, for which the rowers made. The inn stood out just above the landing, cool and white in the sunshine, small and of no pretension, but kept by two of the honestest men in Norway—Jens Klingenberg and his son Jens.

A stalwart man, no longer young, came hurrying down. This, thought I, is the landlord ; and remembering the lesson I had learnt from Herr Lindström,

“Klingenberg ?” said I, as we landed : meaning thereby, “Are you the innkeeper ?”

“Ja ! ja ! Klingenberg !” cried he, with a perfect shout of delight at another proof that his reputation had preceded him into the world. His face shone with honesty and good-will, and grasping my hand to assist in hoisting me up from the boat, he wrung it with a force that brought tears to the eyes—though not, I fear, tears of gratitude. You see, he altogether mistook the question—we were at cross-purposes. A younger man now came out of the house, strong and well made, with an open, intelligent face : too much like the old man to be anyone but Jens Klingenberg junior.

“Klingenberg, I suppose ?” I repeated, as before.

“Ja ! ja !” he cried, just as his father had done, a broad grin upon his honest face, and hastening to welcome us.

So in we went, cramped by our four or five hours’ seat in the boat, and glad to shake out some of the stiffness by a climb up the stairs to the first floor. The rooms were light and cheerful, and the view from the windows was glorious. Before us the little pier, the boatmen now leaning against the sides, and glad enough of a rest : still more glad of some beer, for which they developed unlimited capacities, and Klingenberg inexhaustible stores. Far away beyond the pier stretched the calm deep waters of the fjord ; the stately mountains on either side narrowing more and more towards Aardal, until, away behind the house, they closed in the view.

It was now past one o’clock, and we were only half-way on our journey. From here to the Vettifos was an almost continual ascent, and the road was steep and rugged. Luckily a horse was to be had, or the journey would have been as much beyond my powers as the possession of Aladdin’s lamp, or any other of the cherished impossibilities of youth. Happily, too, A.’s powers of walking and climbing were unlimited : there was no need to draw lots for the “fiery steed.”

We started about two o’clock, with young Klingenberg as guide—a necessary accompaniment. Passing through the village, by the little white church and the cottages, we reached the borders of a small

lake. From an adjoining boathouse Jens brought out a saddle. Then he and two men rowed us swiftly across the water, and we landed again in about a quarter of an hour. We left the boat in charge of the men, and Jens threw the heavy saddle over his shoulder as if it had been but a feather's weight.

About twenty minutes' walk through the fields and over the slopes, and we reached a small settlement, where, hard by, a cream-coloured horse was grazing. In answer to Jens' call, a man came out of a carpenter's shed; a man pale and refined looking, with one of the noblest heads I had ever seen. He gave Jens a nod of good fellowship, and went off for the horse. Jens on his part threw down the



LAERDALSOREN.

saddle, not sorry, with all his strength, to get rid of his load. It fitted the horse's back far better than his shoulder.

As for the horse, it was one of the prettiest, most docile creatures imaginable. Before I had done with it, I loved the animal, and like the Irishman with his cow, could I have sent it over to England in a letter, it should have bid a long farewell to its wild mountain life. It was grazing quietly about a hundred yards away. Then, catching sight of us, it knew well enough what the invasion meant; and pricking up its ears, and arching its neck, gave a slight neigh and began gently trotting up and down, its fine white mane and long tail fluttering in the breeze. It answered the master's call as obediently as a dog, and followed gently at his heels up to the cottage.

We were soon ready and once more on the way. Now began a

long, toilsome climb, which lasted until seven o'clock at night. I had never yet gone through anything of the kind on horseback : I am not sure that I should care to attempt it again. Without ever encountering actual danger—thanks to the sure-footedness of the horse—we were often in what appeared such imminent peril, that more than once I regretted the adventure and devoutly wished myself back again. For the pedestrians there was not even an appearance of risk, beyond the possibility of stones loosening from the heights and rolling down upon them.

From the very beginning I noticed how wonderfully the horse piloted himself over the rough places and through impossible diffi-



ON THE ROAD TO VETTI.

culties ; exercising a skill and discrimination far greater than that of his rider. At length I gave it up to him, and allowed him to take his own course. The sagacity of the animal was marvellous ; the manner in which he would pause a moment at a troublesome spot, seem to pick out his way mentally, and then, boldly taking it, never hesitate until it was over.

Jens was dressed in mountain costume : a short brown jacket, breeches coming down to his knees, dark ribbed stockings, and boots thick and heavy. He carried a thick stick, spiked, and wore a low felt hat, broad and picturesque. Over his arm he had thrown a macintosh, an apparently useless encumbrance this sunny day ; but Jens was wiser than we were, and knew more about his own climate ; and presently, when he got tired of his burden, the horse relieved him of it.

The road was uneven enough from the very beginning, but nothing startling, and for a time we went on calmly. True, the horse would sometimes mount a hillock which brought my head into contact with his ; and in descending reversed the matter, and left it prone with his tail. He seemed to think nothing of these little diversions : took them in so matter-of-fact a spirit that I was forced to do likewise.

In this valley the scenery was laughing, sunny, and almost fertile. Fir trees clothed the slopes, and birches were sprinkled about the plain, which also yielded a carpet of ferns and flowers. But presently we turned to the right, and in a nook of the mountains suddenly came upon the roar of a torrent. In a few moments we were in sight of the grand waterfall itself, rushing down in great strength from the mountain height, breaking in its course into three or four distinct falls, one below the other : an immense volume of white foam making all the air alive with its noise, and destroying the sense of solitude that filled the pass.

A lovely and lonely spot indeed, wild and weird to the last degree. The slopes were a mixture of hard barren rock and pine trees that fringed delicately against the bright blue sky : great boulders stood out frowningly, many of them hundreds of tons in weight, split, in great cracks and fissures, from the mountain, and hanging, as it seemed, by a mere thread. Around us, and in the bed of the torrent, to which they offered small impediment, lay great pieces of rock and stone.

Here I encountered my first "sensation" on horseback, and proved how dependable was my gentle steed. Advancing towards the waterfall, we soon reached a bridge which had to be crossed. It seemed composed of logs of wood, literally not more than a foot wide in all, without any protection on either side in the shape of railing. The water rushed beneath it over great boulders with tremendous force and speed ; the spray flew upwards and around, and as we neared it a cold dampness in the air penetrated to our very marrow. The noise of the waterfall was like thunder ; our voices had quite a far-off sound, and could scarcely be heard. So abundant was the spray that Jens put on his macintosh. The bridge was wet and slippery, and over this I was expected to guide the quadruped in full possession of all my faculties.

The first impulse was to get down ; but I saw that by so doing I should so sink in the estimation of Jens, that of the two evils I preferred the least certain, and kept my seat. Away we went, and I gave myself up for lost.

But the horse took the planks with the greatest coolness ; and in the very middle of the bridge, within an ace of the rushing water, deafened and confused by the noise, wet and chilled by the spray, came to a dead stop, as much as to say : "Admire this sublime scene, but above all admire the steadiness of my nerve and the coolness of my head." Then, at a slight call from Jens, who was in advance

with A., he quietly set in motion again, and got over to the other side.

I felt that I had gone through a tremendous peril ; had had a narrow escape from the jaws of death. In reality it was nothing of the sort, and existed only in imagination ; but that made no difference to the impression. Certainly if the horse had slipped both would have rolled over : there was no space to recover footing. But these horses never do slip, and you must make up your mind to resign yourself to them in faith.

If danger existed at all, it came after : it was then one really required to bring courage and coolness to aid. Now began a very steep, sharp, and, as it seemed, perilous ascent for one on horseback. The narrow, broken path wound up the mountain, and we gradually seemed to rise far above the valley and the world, and to be on a level with the waterfall. We now looked down upon what we had so lately looked up to, and seemed to command the situation. The water rushed below us with a far-off sound. Often I could not see an inch of ground beside me : nothing but space. The path was rough, and its curves were so sharp and sudden that more than once the horse brought his feet together, and his head overhung one side of the precipice and his tail overhung the other. At such moments I felt like Mahomet's coffin, hovering between heaven and earth ; like an eagle suspended in mid air, but—I hardly blush to own it—without the eagle's courage because without his wings. I gazed sheerly into yawning depths ; to slip from the horse's back would have been to step into thin air.

All this would have been lost in walking, as it was lost upon A., who serenely wended his rough way onwards, yet more than once turned round to call out that he would sooner trust his own legs than the horse's. He and Jens took the lead and kept it easily. My progress on horseback was a far slower one than theirs on foot. The animal was deliberate in his movements, pondered them well, paused every now and then a whole half-minute between one step and the next. He knew that the slightest mistake meant death to himself and his rider. In some places the slip of an inch, a tread upon a loose stone, would have given us a long flight into the depths, to take our place amongst the rocks, and for ever to pass out of life and our little earthly sphere. It is melancholy to think that the world would have gone on rolling just the same.

“ Our little systems have their day ;
They have their day, and cease to be.”

So it is for the very best of us. But I do not know that this is productive of any individual consolation. Companionship in suffering, which creates sympathy one with another, we know is sweet to man, who is made up of such a mixture of good and ill ; but in the closing scene of all, this consolation is for ever denied us.

At length we reached our highest point and began to descend. Tremendous and dangerous as seemed the climbing, the downward process was far worse. Every now and then the horse himself would stand still, and Jens had to rouse his drooping courage by a call: once or twice he even had to come back and lead him forward.

So we went on, until we reached once more an open level plain, through which ran a noisy shallow stream—water pursues us everywhere in Norway—the shallower the noisier, according to the fashion of this world and the custom of the people in it. Here was green grass and soft turf; and the horse and its rider, now on excellent terms with each other, made up for lost time, passed Jens and A. with a bound, and went flying off on the wings of the wind. Before the pedestrians had traversed that long bit of plain, we had scoured it half-a-dozen times. Then a short ascent, and we reached the small farm of Gjelde, and were half way to Vetti.

Here we dismounted, and found ourselves in a mountain hut or cottage, the interior so dark that we could scarcely distinguish the long deal table at one end, a rough chair or bench here and there, and a bed in a kind of recess. A woman, the sole occupant, appeared glad to see anyone coming up from the world, though that world might be no larger or more important than Aardal. Opposite this hut was another, where sat a woman and a girl near a braize fire, in a chimney almost as big as the hut itself. The woman was rolling out some oat-cake dough into the thickness of a sixpence, large and round, about two feet in diameter. When rolled it seemed tough and hard, more like paper than anything else. This, with acrobatic dexterity and the aid of a long thin stick, she tossed upon a large flat piece of iron, a sort of frying-pan without sides, and placed it upon the embers. When baked it was tossed again on to a pile lying beside her. This was called “*flad-bröd*,” and flat it certainly was in every sense of the word: tasteless, and containing, one supposed, a small amount of nourishment. But the Norwegians seem able to keep life in the body with what would be gradual starvation to other people. No doubt their free healthy life, which calls for the smallest possible wear and tear of the nervous system, counts for a great deal in the matter. For, with it all, they are hardy and contented. The old woman sitting near her braize fire, baking her bread, was a veritable picture: a strange picture of life, full of rough power; a certain silent eloquence that carried its lesson, if one chose to see the application. She looked at us in a kindly manner, and nodded, but never moved from her position or ceased from her work.

The hardest part of the road yet lay before us, and began with the very beginning. As we left the cottage, down in the fields of this little farm we saw two men ploughing in an original manner. Their arms were thrown round each other's necks, and thus, naturally yoked together, they dragged the plough behind them, and the work was done.

Soon after starting we came to another magnificent cataract, the Gjeldefos, which, from a tremendous height, fell in showers of beautiful spray; now hundreds of feet clear of all obstacles, and now coming into contact with the rock and fringing itself into white foam and devices so fantastic, that it seemed as if Art had here lent her aid to Nature. This fall was infinitely beautiful.

The ascent now became so steep and rugged, the paths so difficult and broken, so full of loose stones, that it was harder work than ever both for the horse and the walkers. Higher we ascended, and yet more high, and wilder, grander and more sublime and severe grew the scenery. The rugged mountains gradually closed in the pass, which became so contracted that we seemed to be reaching the end of all things. Far down we gazed into a narrow gorge, through which the noisy shallow water ran: an accumulation of trees, rocks, stones, ferns and wild-flowers; a tremendous mountain chasm; all the difficulties and sublime points of the Valley of Diamonds, but alas, without its precious stones. Here and there the mountain sides were perpendicular from the top to the bottom: immense walls of stone that took one's very breath away to contemplate.

The weather now changed. Heavy clouds gathered and threw their dark shadows over the pass, which assumed a weird, sombre, and dejected appearance. One felt the influence insensibly, and a downpour of rain now commenced. The very beauties of nature take to themselves wings, when the sun withdraws his face. Jens, with a macintosh coming down to his heels, set weather and rain at defiance; whilst the beauties of the pass seemed equally indifferent to him. But A., who had brought no macintosh, turned up his collar, and began to look out for signs of the Vetti farm.

In due time they declared themselves. At length we seemed to rise on a level with the mountain tops; we turned off from the narrow path edging the precipice, and passing to the right, reached a sort of plateau or table-land, still rough and uneven, but evidently the beginning of the end. In a short time, 5,000 feet above the level of the sea, out of the world, out of sight and sound of humanity; in a spot secret, retired, and silent as the grave—and little less cheerful—we came upon the humble settlement of the Vetti Farm. The rain was pouring in torrents; it was now seven o'clock; evidently we could do nothing but remain here quietly for the night, and go on to the fall the next morning. For though at *Vetti*, we were not at the *fos*: it would still take two hours to reach it, acquaint ourselves with its wonders, and return to the farm.

Jens was relieved at our decision. That very morning only he had returned from the Vettifos with two young students who had come all the way from Sweden for the purpose of making excursions in Aardal and the Sogne Fjord: and though he seemed still to have plenty of work in him, he must have had enough of it for one day.

So we made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. A solitary mountain hut, dark skies, a steady downpour of rain; a temperature cold and chilling; no fire; people who spoke not one word of English; all this was only conducive to hilarity to such natures as belong to Mr. Mark Tapley.

Yet we found more than could have been expected in a spot so desolate, so difficult of access, so remote from the world—and so far above it. The little hut contained a living-room, two tiny sleeping-rooms, just large enough to hold two small beds in each, and a fourth room that was half bed, half store-room. As there was not space in the sleeping-rooms for a bed *and* a wash-hand-stand, a basin—not too large—was placed on a chair in a sitting-room; and an original looking-glass developed mountains and precipices in one's physiognomy and reflected a double set of features. We endeavoured to buy it as a curiosity, but the people evidently considered it a rare and precious article, and refused to part with it.

This cottage had evidently been built for the accommodation of travellers. The people of the farm lived in a building opposite, which seemed composed of one large room, with a huge chimney corner, where peats were burning, and sending forth fragrant odours. They were decent, civilized-looking people, like most of their kind we saw in Aardal: men and women of a type above the ordinary men and women one meets with in that class of life.

They prepared us a famous tea in their own quarters, and ran across with it to ours. The very fact of not being able to comprehend each other—for not even Jens spoke a word of English—made the slight errors and misunderstandings that occurred, so many golden opportunities for merriment in this gloomy abode.

Before Jens disappeared for the night we had a long and animated conversation with him, and though often wide of the mark, each was convinced of being thoroughly understood by the other. There was something so intelligent about Jens, that his ignorance of English was nothing short of a disgrace: he was so open, frank and honest, so anxious to please, so gentle and quiet, that we felt ourselves lucky to have found so pleasant a guide. In this benighted spot, not only hours, but days and weeks away from all civilization, an ill-tempered or morose fellow, with an “evil eye” or an ungainly cast of countenance, would have been an object for conciliation with fear and trembling. Jens was the exact opposite to all this.

The next morning we started soon after five o'clock for the Vettifos. From this point everyone had to walk: the path was too rugged, broken, and precipitous for any horse to attempt it.

A road rough and rugged indeed; full of rocks and stones, brambles and wild roots; overgrown with tangle which concealed many of the inequalities, and sent you now and then sprawling head foremost in a manner more grotesque than pleasant. A sharp, steep, quick descent. The rain, which had come down in torrents all night,

had now ceased ; but the path was wet and slippery, and the shrubs, often up to one's waist, were dripping water.

At last the bottom ; and turning sharply to the right, before us was the waterfall we had come so far to seek. A high, perpendicular cliff, straight as a wall, and over the summit came tumbling the white water, in a clear fall of 1,000 feet, touching no rock, meeting no obstacle in its way. In this its greatest attraction consists. Other falls are as high, and higher ; other falls have as great a body of water, and greater ; but an unbroken descent of 1,000 feet, this is what other falls have not. Fancy an immense column of water falling nearly three times the height of St. Paul's.

And yet we were both disappointed. There was no doubt about that. We had heard so much of the Vettifos ; it had been described in colours so glowing as an eighth wonder of the world, and one of the great wonders of Norway, that we had expected more than the reality. In point of beauty it was not to be compared with the two great waterfalls we had passed on the road from Aardal.

The surrounding rocks were so gigantic that the immense height could not be realised. The body of water was small : so small that towards the bottom the water lost itself in spray. After heavy rains it increases, but the rains of this one night had not made any perceptible difference. Jens said he had often seen a much greater volume of water than to-day. It was certainly wonderful to see this long, unbroken column ; to trace its progress from the moment it left the height to the very end, always falling, falling, falling ; but it raised little emotion beyond that of marvel.

Many things were against us. We had had to turn out at an early hour ; the dull, gloomy morning threatened rain ; it was cold and raw ; the road had been wet and unpleasant, the walk laborious in the extreme ; imagination had found nothing on which to fasten itself. Well for us that the whole way up from Aardal had been so full of beauty—it is one of the grandest passes in Norway—so sublime in its severity, which had more than delighted and repaid us for our exertions : otherwise, to disappointment would have been added vexation of spirit.

We could not approach within many yards of the fall : the cold was freezing, and the spray would have drenched us through in a few moments. So we contented ourselves with a seat upon huge stones at a respectful distance, and watched the water, which took all sorts of fantastic devices on its course from the top to the bottom, according to the power with which it fell over the edge. The whole surrounding scene was inexpressibly wild, rugged, and barren, but most beautiful, and with sunshine it would have been far more so. Mountains enclosed us in a great rocky rampart, impregnable, impassable : we were at the ends of the earth.

After a sufficiently long spell of gazing, we started again for Vetti. If the downward road had been hard work, what must be said of the

up-hill way in returning? A. and Jens took it as a very matter-of-fact affair: went up and up, and would have gone up and up very comfortably until Doomsday, I verily believe. It was quite exasperating. Every now and then they turned round from their far-ahead vantage ground, and pityingly surveyed a struggling mortal who never thought to reach Vetti alive, and to whom they never offered help or consolation. But we got there at last, about eight o'clock, and after half an hour's rest were thankful for breakfast.

About nine, or soon after, Jens brought up the horse, and we started on our journey back to Aardal. What should I have done



VETTI FARM.

without my gentle steed? Certainly have left my bones behind me at Vetti, or on the road.

Our return journey was nearly all down hill, and so much the more difficult for the horse to keep a firm footing. We soon got into the old path, and looked over the giddy precipice into the yawning depths, where still the noisy water ran its course. If I had cared little for my position yesterday, I cared still less for it to-day. Again we found ourselves in the same critical situation; and again, at one or two of the sharp turnings, the horse's head overhung one side of the terrible precipice, and his tail the other. Once more I felt myself suspended in mid-air, and went through the same terrific sensations. At one such spot, I remember well, the faithful steed came to a dead stand, unable to take his next step. His limbs trembled: I almost think his rider's did too. Had it been possible I should have dismounted; but to get down on the one side would have been to

send the horse over, and to get down on the other would have been to consign myself to the abyss: there was not an inch of ground to stand upon. In vain Jens called: he had to come back at last, and guide the horse round the curve.

In due time we reached the Gjelde Farm, and were half way to Aardal. It was Sunday—we had regretted having to travel on the Sunday, but there was no help for it—and the quiet of Sunday reigned in the little tenements. All the women folk were away, including the bread-baker. One of the youths we had seen ploughing yesterday was standing at the door, dressed in his best, and hailed Jens with acclamation. Jens seemed a very popular character wherever he went, and evidently well deserved the honour. Here we rested for twenty minutes or more; then off again, and in due time reached the farm where we had first taken the horse. No wonder I loved the gentle creature, after the apparent dangers we had gone through together, and parted from him with sorrow.

Jens shouldered the saddle; we made for the boat, were soon on



THE VETTIPOS.

the water, and soon at the other side. It was a glorious row across that lake, closely surrounded by the mountains, where sheep and goats were skipping about the green slopes. The saddle was put back in the boat-house, and we went on to the village. The villagers in their Sunday costumes looked smart and happy. The church was closed, for no service had been held there that day. In many parts of Norway there is perhaps one clergyman for four churches, so that each church gets a turn once a month. Again the superiority of the people was manifest ; fine, well-built men and women, with handsome, intelligent faces.

At the inn old Jens Klingenberg came out and greeted us as if we had known him for six months, and had brought him some long-coveted favour. It was now two o'clock, but what with resting, and dinner, and chatting with Jens : falling into blunders, and falling out of them again : we were not off until some time past three. Poor Jens ! in spite of his strong, thick boots, his feet were sore—he had performed the journey twice in forty-eight hours—and he told us that not for a king's ransom would he have started off again that day or the next. The charge for the whole thing was very moderate.

The men were ready, and we went down to the boat. A long, hard row was before them, for part of the way the tide would be contrary. Klingenberg and Jens escorted us down the pier in procession, gave us a hand-grasp, bade us come again, and we pushed off. Receding gradually, we left a vision of peace and beauty behind us. The little village in the quiet rest of the Sunday ; the small white houses with their red roofs and green shutters ; the tiny church with its quaint spire ; the amphitheatre of hills in the back-ground : all formed a picture not to be forgotten. Jens, old and young, sat one on each side of the portico up the stone steps, watching us out of sight, until they became mere dots in the landscape, and the vision faded. Jens Klingenberg, senior and junior, I love you both for your honest, manly natures ; for the traces of a quiet, straightforward life that shone out in both your faces : natures not so common in the world that they should be passed over without a word of record.

For six long hours we were rowing across the Sogne Fjord, amidst the gloomy mountains that were as grand and majestic to day as they had been yesterday, and grew more weird and mysterious as twilight fell. Something else fell too ; rain in such torrents as we do not often see in England. Here and there perfect columns and spouts of water shot down from the clouds, athwart the mountains, and into the fjord. One of the men had a macintosh, and insisted on A.'s using it, whilst the man, rowing in shirt sleeves, got wet to the skin. I vow I could not have taken it. But we made it up to him afterwards, and no doubt he would be willing enough to go through a soaking again upon the same terms.

At length we came in sight of Laerdal, and presently landed upon

terra firma : glad enough to do so. My first question at the inn was for the landlord, and I asked for "Klingenbergs" of the woman who was in the dining-room. I never made out that woman ; there was something silent and uncanny about her ; something secret and not above-board. She moved about with a slow quiet step, had a strange way of looking at you ; would listen to what you had to say with a rude stony stare, and turn away without sign or token of having heard or heeded. But presently she would return with the commission executed. Even about the landlord himself there was something peculiar. He was comparatively young, good-looking, gentlemanly in appearance, and well dressed. But he had a way of frowning when speaking to you, which might perhaps be put down to his endeavours to catch what was said to him in English. He had not a way of making you welcome, and you left the inn without regret.

To-night, when I went and asked for "Klingenbergs," the woman stared as usual, but disappeared much faster than was her wont. She went out, found the landlord and said to him : "The Englishmen have come back from Vetti, and one of them is asking all over the place for Klingenbergs : do you think he is out of his mind ?"

The landlord came in laughing, and the mystery was explained. He had misunderstood my former question—rather a habit of his. Klingenberg was only the name of the innkeeper at Aardal : the Norwegian for innkeeper was *Verten*.

So ended, on the whole, one of our pleasantest excursions in Norway, and one that I should feel very sorry to have passed over. We saw no scenery of its kind more severely grand and sublime than this mountain pass ; and in spite of some disappointment in the Vettifoss itself, we had been well repaid for our trouble. The whole two days' experience, with the figures of Jens Klingenberg and his son Jens standing out prominently in the foreground, and fading from view as we shot away into the broad arm of the Sogne Fjord, has left a lasting impression upon the memory. May we not have met for the last time !

We had not many hours' rest that night. The next morning at four o'clock we were to take the steamer down the Sogne Fjord to Bergen : thence start onward for the North Cape, cross the Arctic Circle, and enter the regions of the midnight sun.

"MR. SMITH."

I.

IT was about six o'clock upon a June evening, and the rays of the declining sun were still shining down hotly upon a small railway station in the midst of a sleepy, agricultural district. A long, low building, with a gravelled platform and one iron bench, enclosed in wooden palings, formed the whole erection ; and all glittered incredibly white in the warm sunbeams.

To break the perfect repose of the rural scene there was but one moving figure, which was that of a rather small and stunted boy in a dark, quiet livery. His consequence, however, was sufficient for an army ; as he strutted up and down the platform he was casting contemptuous glances at the low, white station-house, at the pastoral landscape, at the shining lines of rails. This superior being was presently aroused from the contemplation of his own greatness by the appearance of the train in the distance, when he immediately assumed a very business-like, wide-awake air. But the approach of the train had become known in other quarters also, and an official now issued from the low white building, carefully locking the door behind him.

Upon the stoppage of the train it became apparent at once that there were but two passengers for Redbrook—one, a stout country-woman with a market basket upon her arm ; the other a young man, who sprang briskly from his compartment, and made his way to the luggage van. Leaving the country-woman to get her fat self and her basket out as best she might, the solitary official hustled up to the first-class passenger.

"Your luggage, sir? Was it labelled *Redbrook*? What name? 'Smith,' did you say, sir? Thank you."

But now the small and important servant came up, touching his hat, and speaking with a great air.

"Allow me, sir," said he, taking a bag from the young man's hand. "What luggage have you? I'll see to it; the carriage is on the other side, sir."

Notwithstanding the re-assuring air and words, the traveller waited to see his portmanteau correctly out of the van ; and then, glad of the fresh evening breeze, strolled round in the direction indicated by the servant. As soon as he had rounded the station-house, the young man, by name Jeffrey Smith, perceived a pony-carriage in waiting, and, seated in it, a young lady. She was attired in a plain print dress with only a few knots of pale-coloured ribbon here and there to relieve its monotony ; upon her head was a wide straw hat,

as simple as the rest of her attire ; and for her face, its chief merit lay in its youthfulness and brilliancy of colouring. But altogether the girlish figure, the low carriage, and the rural landscape made a very refreshing spectacle to Mr. Smith, wearied with long confinement, the worries and excitements of London.

Mr. Smith advanced hesitatingly, not sure who the young lady might prove to be. Her words, however, at once informed him. Directly she had caught sight of his advancing form, she extended her hand and spoke with frank cordiality ; her voice being as pleasant and refined as her appearance.

" How do you do, Mr. Smith ? My father was so sorry not to be able to come himself to welcome you, but he had an important meeting to attend this afternoon."

Mr. Smith took the outstretched hand, thinking within himself that he should enjoy the drive quite as much in the company of his host's daughter as in that of his host personally ; perhaps more so.

" Will you get in ? " said the girl next. " Thomas, I hope, is seeing to your luggage. The waggon will bring it."

" I am being the occasion of a great deal of trouble."

" Not at all ; the waggon had already to come for some farm implement, so that need not be upon your mind," answered the young lady in an independent, business-like way that Mr. Smith soon found was a characteristic of hers. " Is all right, Thomas ? " she asked of the servant, who now came up and clambered to his place ; upon which the young lady touched up the ponies, and away they went at a fair pace.

" There are no lions to point out to you, Mr. Smith ; so that unless you can admire a quiet country landscape, I am afraid you will be disappointed in the neighbourhood."

There was a scent of the hay-harvest in the air ; the tall ragged-robin in the hedges nodded their pink heads ; the delicate meadow-sweet held its dainty flowers erect ; the long grasses waved gracefully ; the trees, singly and in groups, stood out in deep dark masses of foliage ; a brown stream glided through the fields, beside which the cattle rested, ruminating in full content ; all was rich, peaceful, pastoral, and the young man looked around him quite satisfied with his position and the prospect.

" It may be a great deficiency in taste," answered he, laughing ; " but I am not sure that I do not like a rich agricultural country like this better than the grandeur of wilder scenery."

" Of course I like the country ; I never find it dull ; but I am afraid of our not being able to find you much amusement."

Jeffrey was beginning to deprecate this view of the case, when he was interrupted by the ponies being pulled up. They had overtaken the old woman, who had been the other passenger in the train by which he had arrived.

" Well, Nanny ! a warm evening. Shall we take your basket for

you? You can call for it at the house, and get some supper as you go by."

"Thank you, Miss Lettice; 'tis warm," answered the old woman, wiping her heated face, and preparing to disburden herself.

"Here, Thomas," said the young lady to the servant, who was looking on disdainfully with folded arms, "help Nanny up with her basket." And at the command of his mistress he had no choice but to unfold his arms and assist the old woman, who was anxiously covering up one corner of her basket.

"What have you got there, Nanny? A new cap?"

"Yes, miss; and will you see as those maids of yours don't get fittin' un on."

"Very well, Nanny," said the girl laughing, as she laid her whip lightly upon the ponies' shining flanks, and started afresh. "I think that is only Nanny's delicate way of putting the case; it is in reality myself whom she is afraid of not being able to resist that tempting adornment."

"I am not sure that her misgivings are without reason," said Smith, smiling in his turn. To feel otherwise than friendly towards this frank girl was as impossible as it would be to treat her with other than the truest respect. "I shall make it my first duty to look after Nanny's interests."

"Pray do. Come, my beauties, we must be getting on," added she, shaking the ponies' reins encouragingly. "I hope you did not mind my stopping? We try to help our neighbours here in the country; we have not much else to think of," she added apologetically, turning round and glancing into her companion's face.

"I was amused at the idea for a moment; but I think it was a very good thought of yours," answered the young man warmly.

A short space more of the country road with its flowery banks, and the carriage turned off, and bowed smoothly up an avenue of chestnuts through a park of small extent; and in a very few minutes more they pulled up at a low, straggling house. It was an irregular building with a high peaked roof and many angles, but perhaps in its main outline it might be said to follow the form of three sides of a quadrangle, having at one bend a short square tower, which gave dignity to the structure and somewhat relieved its low, rambling character.

The door stood wide open to admit the summer air, fragrant with the balmy breath of many roses; and the girl, giving the reins to the groom, stepped from the carriage and conducted Smith across the wide hall to a room at the rear of the house.

"My father will most likely be in the library. Yes," said she, flinging wide the doors after a preliminary peep within, glancing over her shoulder to the young man who was following her.

"Here is Mr. Smith, papa!"

Her father, who had been seated in his study chair reading the

newspaper, laid it down upon the entrance of his daughter; and taking off his spectacles, rose to greet his guest with a bland smile of welcome upon his face. But as his eye fell upon his visitor, the urbane expression of his countenance changed to one of blank surprise, and he drew himself up stiffly.

"Who are you?" cried the old gentleman.

Jeffrey, upon his part, was little less taken aback at his reception.

"Is Mr. Lorimer not at home?"

"How should I know? What do you mean, sir?"

"Is Mr. Lorimer not expecting me? Where is he?"

"In his own house a dozen miles from here, I should imagine!" cried the little old gentleman; his face pink, and every hair upon his white, woolly head seeming to bristle with pugnacity.

"In his own house a dozen miles from here!" echoed Jeffrey Smith, blankly. "I can't understand you."

"I can't understand *you*, sir!" retorted the other.

"Stay, there is some mistake," said Lettice, who had been looking in amazement from one to the other. "Mr. Smith, whom did you come to see?"

"Mr. Lorimer, of course," answered the young man promptly, turning to the girl with evident relief.

"But we have hardly a visiting acquaintance with them! Why come here?"

"I have never been there, but it is a place called The Cedars, and I thought I was coming to it now; is not this it?"

What reply the young lady might have given, can never be known, for the old gentleman, Mr. Warburton, took up the subject again. "I see it all!" cried he, throwing up his hands. "The boy should have gone to the Cedars, and has come here six miles out of his way!"

"Then this is not Mr. Lorimer's! How stupid! I was to have gone there on a week's visit."

"Most extraordinary to me," Mr. Warburton muttered to himself, "how a person does not know where he is going, and takes care he gets there."

The colour rose to Jeffrey Smith's forehead; and he was none the less annoyed that he felt the blood mounting to his face. "I am sorry for any inconvenience that I may have caused you, sir," he said; "and I think now that I had better lose no time in starting for my destination."

"Tut, tut, tut, young man, don't mount the high horse; sit down, sit down; I was only thinking of you. For ourselves, if we have not got the right visitor, we are very glad of the wrong one."

"You are very kind, but I will take up no more of your time. Besides, I imagine I shall get no conveyance in these rustic parts, therefore the sooner I start the better," answered Smith, melting into his own genial self at the other's more cordial manner.

"Nonsense! there is no conveyance to be had here, I cannot

send you such a distance, for one of my horses is lame ; so you must make yourself comfortable for the present. You came of your own free will and choice, and you must stay now against it. It would be an excellent joke, too, but for poor Smith cooling his heels on Redbrook platform."

"I don't think, papa, he could have arrived," said Lettice, who had laid aside her straw hat, and seated herself beside the table.

"You were expecting a friend by this train ?—Of course," added Jeffrey, correcting himself ; "or the mistake could not have arisen about me. No person got out of the train but myself and the old woman with the cap," smiling at Lettice. "I looked about me thoroughly, so I can assure you no one was there."

"Very well, all's well that ends well. Ring the bell, my dear, for this gentleman to be shown to his room—he can have Smith's," said Mr. Warburton, as impulsively hospitable now as he had been unbearably irate before. With all his simplicity and impulsiveness he was not without some judgment, and he had taken a liking for this young stranger with his good looks and gentlemanly bearing : and was honestly pleased to have him within his doors.

Miss Warburton had kept quite silent and aloof throughout the discussion ; but when he at length yielded to her father's persuasions, Smith could not resist stealing a glance in her direction to read her mind, and he fancied that he could detect a faint smile of satisfaction dimpling her pretty mouth. So in improved spirits he proceeded to his room, where he was informed his luggage was already. In twenty minutes his toilette was complete, and he made his way back to the room in which he had been received. Quick, though, as he considered he had been in dressing, he found Miss Warburton had been yet quicker, for as he opened the door, he heard her clear voice in conversation.

"Well, I must say I thought he looked rather young."

"I should think so. How you could take that lad to be the professor ——" Mr. Warburton was beginning, when he was awakened to the fact of Jeffrey Smith's presence in the room.

A slight flush dawned upon Lettice's fair cheeks at the unexpected entrance of their subject of conversation, but she faced the position frankly.

"Yes," she began with her low sweet laugh ; "we were talking of you. I was just saying that, although no doubt of your identity entered my mind, you did not fulfil my ideal of a learned professor."

"I think that unkind, Miss Warburton. You should have left me under the illusion that I looked an embodiment of wisdom and erudition."

"How did the mistake arise ? How was it that you came from the station with me ?"

"I cannot tell you exactly ; I have been thinking over the circumstances, and I can only remember that your servant came up and

took my bag from my hand, saying the carriage was waiting for me outside the station."

"I knew it!" cried Mr. Warburton. "I knew that young rascal had something to do with it; he is at the bottom of every piece of mischief. We'll have him here to give an account of himself."

"What is the use, papa?" said Lettice, laughing "He will only prove everybody to be in the wrong but himself."

At this moment dinner was announced, Miss Warburton being given into Smith's charge; with which arrangement he was well pleased. The more he saw of Lettice, the more he was charmed with her vivacity and intelligence. She was also prettier than he had at first thought her, now that he saw her with her pretty hair uncovered, and her bright, youthful face set off by evening dress. This was as simple as her outdoor attire had been, but it was of some shining white material, and it left her round white throat and arms exposed to view, and set off her light and graceful figure. There was a slight dash of independence in her manner and speech, but it was only sufficient to lend a certain piquancy to her remarks. He had a considerable experience of her powers of entertainment in the course of the evening, for Mr. Warburton fell asleep immediately upon their adjournment to the drawing-room.

By the help of some music, and Miss Warburton's conversation, the evening flew by, and Jeffrey Smith was first recalled to a sense of time by Lettice ringing for chamber candles, and bidding himself and her father good-night.

The slight stir had awakened the latter, and he now undertook the office of entertainer.

"Do you smoke?" asked the old gentleman, blinking his eyes and pushing his fingers through the snow-white wool that covered his head; as he sat very erect and looked at Smith.

"Not regularly; but when I am shown a bad example, I sometimes take a cigar."

"Very well, I'll set you that bad example; we'll have just one whiff before going to bed. But we must go to my sanctum. Do you notice what a queer house this is?" asked Mr. Warburton as, followed by his guest, he shuffled along an extensive corridor to a far-off room.

"It covers a great deal of ground, surely."

"Yes, for it is built entirely on the ground floor, but for the small tower that I added; my daughter considers the rooms in it hers, the windows look over the woods and are pleasant; at any rate, they are her choice. The man who lived here before me, and for whom the house was built, was blind. You recollect your bedroom, I suppose: it lies over there," the old gentleman concluded, pointing over his shoulder.

"Yes, I marked its position, at the end of the passage, past the tower staircase."

"Right! now I think I can give you a cigar that you will enjoy."

II.

By eleven o'clock that night Mr. Smith was in bed; but twelve, sounding from some clock in the neighbourhood, discovered him still awake; and when the single stroke of one in due time came trembling through the still summer air, his restlessness had only increased. This wakefulness was becoming oppressive, and he at last set to courting the perverse and fickle goddess in sober earnest, and strove to remember all the methods that he had heard recommended for obtaining sleep. He had been told that counting was an infallible charm: well! Jeffrey reckoned up the National Debt, and was as wide awake as though he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then he remembered that the true method of composing oneself was to fix the mind upon a single idea, such as sheep successively jumping a hedge. Accordingly, he saw the flocks of Abraham over the gap he had conjured up in his imagination, with the result that he was rather more lively than before. Then he tried repeating poetry and went hunting for a missing line through half the English poets. And last he essayed the reiteration of a word again and again until at length it had no more meaning or sense than the changes rung upon a bell. Stop! at this rate he felt he should soon land in hopeless imbecility. He would rise, walk about, read, occupy himself in some manner; and springing up he sought a light. The matches were not to be found, but there might be a match or two in his own bag. This he recollects to have left in the dressing-room which adjoined his bed-chamber. The window here was not screened by thick dark blinds as those of the sleeping apartment were, and he soon found his bag: when, as he was feeling amongst its fittings for his match-box, he became conscious of a peculiar smell and sound in the room. The door had been left overnight accidentally ajar, and through this opening the strange influences stole. The next moment he was convinced of the cause.

The place was on fire!

Jeffrey ventured out and looked forth; and there at the end of the passage, rolling onward to meet him, was a volume of white smoke. Without a moment's loss of time he turned back into his room; and, hastily assuming some of his clothes, hurried out again. Perfectly ignorant which rooms were tenanted and which not, he knocked at every door, shouting "Fire! fire!" He himself pressed on to the immediate scene of the conflagration. The origin of the fire he could not discover; but upon turning the corner of the long corridor it was apparent that the tower stairs were burning. The column of smoke was now very dense, but the flames seemed to be issuing from beneath this staircase. Good Heavens! Was it not here that he had been told Miss Warburton slept? How far had the fire reached? Had

it already done its work of destruction? Before Jeffrey's sight swept a vision of the girl as he had seen her last night, bright, sunny, beautiful, and now possibly a mere heap of charred and blackened ruin. It spurred him on to instantaneous effort. He made an attempt to ascend; the smoke was blinding, the hot air swept his face with scorching fierceness; but the stairs still afforded firm and secure footing. The flames, however, were licking with ominous greed at the light wooden baluster and its supports. He gained the door which he supposed must be that of Miss Warburton's room, and, after a hasty knock, turned the handle. The door yielded. He could make out the white bed, could almost catch the shimmer of the golden hair upon the pillow even in that dim light.

"Miss Warburton! waken!" he cried. And then thinking the true cause of the disturbance would be less alarming to the girl than the strange presence in her room, he added: "Don't be frightened; but the house is on fire."

Jeffrey guessed that she was not the kind of woman to go into hysterics, or faint, or do anything else absurd; he had reckoned upon her showing courage and presence of mind, and he found himself right in his estimate.

"Yes; who is it? What is the matter?" she said, bewildered, but sitting erect, and speaking calmly.

"It is I, Miss Warburton; there is a fire in the house. I do not think it is much, but the stairs are burning. Will you come at once?"

"Yes, but —"

"Don't wait! Just wrap yourself in something woollen," said he, walking to the door and opening it in readiness, but the next moment he shut it to again. The flames had already gained the very lintels.

"Quick, Miss Warburton! There is not a moment to lose!" cried he sharply.

The next moment Lettice had glided up to his side where he stood waiting for her. He took her hand to lead her forward; she was very ready and composed, but Jeffrey could feel that she trembled nervously. Holding her fingers now in a firmer grasp to re-assure her, he opened the door and stepped out on the small landing.

"Not through there! not through there!" she cried, drawing back with a violent shudder at the sight of the smoke and flames.

Seeing her dismay and reluctance Mr. Smith spoke to her hurriedly. "Our only alternative is the window; is there a verandah or anything of that sort below it?"

"No, nothing."

"No projection of any kind to climb out upon?"

"None," she answered, trying to steady her voice; "the wall falls sheer down to the ground."

"Come, then; you shall not be hurt if I can help it. Escape is easy enough if only the stairs be stone: at all events, they are but

a short flight," said he encouragingly; but at the same time he stole a glance of much anxiety at the girl.

She was only protected by some thin wrapper, her little naked white feet were simply thrust into a pair of slippers, her fair hair hung in a fleecy cloud over her shoulders. Plenty for those hungry flames to feed upon; little to resist their voracity.

Darting back into the room, Smith seized a blanket from the bed, and rolling it round her, lifted her speechless with astonishment into his arms, and dashed right on. Burdened as he was, and blinded by the smoke, he stumbled on, never hesitating until he reached the base, where what seemed to be a solid wall of fire withstood his progress. But it was too late for hesitation, too late to go back; and, with a more fervent prayer for help than ever he had uttered in his life before, he plunged on. A moment later they stood safe beyond the reach of the flames. Safe upon the solid ground, safe as by a miracle; safe, though with hearts that yet throbbed quickly from the late sense of peril. And deeply thankful; one at least had never tasted the full sweetness of existence until that moment of blessed relief.

Setting his precious burden down, Jeffrey Smith staggered back against the wall, more exhausted by his exertions, and more hurt by the scorching breath of the flames, than he cared to own. He was aroused by the sound of a soft voice speaking to him.

"I know what you have done, Mr. Smith; I know that you have saved my life at the risk of your own."

"Not at all; it is nothing," answered the young man quickly.

"It is so much that I can say nothing," said the girl, looking up at him, her eyes full of tears, her tones broken by emotion.

"There was no one else sleeping in that part of the house, was there?" asked Jeffrey, starting up, struck by a sudden thought.

"No! oh, no!" cried Lettice, laying her hand detainingly upon his arm, fearful that he was going to explore afresh.

"I was not thinking of starting upon a second expedition," said he smiling; and taking her hand, he held it in his in a warm clasp.

The next moment they were interrupted by the awakened household assembling. One by one the inmates of the house came trooping up in every form of unfinished and peculiar attire: but all worked with such a will, and the supply of water was so good, that the fire was extinguished by the time day dawned. Not, however, before the staircase was wholly consumed, and Miss Warburton's rooms partly destroyed, and wholly spoiled by the double action of the smoke and the hose from the garden, which had been brought to play upon the conflagration.

The world of nature had been some time astir, and the sun was some height in the heavens when Jeffrey retired to bed for the second time, but he now slept soundly until nine o'clock. Hastening then, he found awaiting him in the breakfast-room Mr. Warburton, walking up

and down in a state of great agitation. Seated before the urn was Lettice herself, looking as fresh as though she had passed the night in tranquil slumber upon a bed of roses, and had stolen some of their bloom and sweetness for herself.

Mr. Warburton hailed Jeffrey as his daughter's deliverer, making many attempts to thank him for the great service he had rendered them, but as regularly broke down: and as upon each occasion he wrung Smith's hand almost to the point of dislocating his shoulder, the latter was not sorry when he abandoned the endeavour to express his gratitude, and proposed that breakfast should be proceeded with.

No sooner was the meal over than Jeffrey and Lettice were invited to be present at the inquiry Mr. Warburton was about to institute into the cause of the fire. He was not going to have his house burned down about his ears and not know the reason why. So the entire staff of servants was summoned, and the inquiry opened with great formality.

Each of the men-servants separately denied all knowledge of the matter: but when it came to the women-servants' turn to be interrogated, Mrs. Bennett, the housekeeper, a homely old woman, but a privileged person, who had evidently been on thorns for ten minutes past to get in a word, answered with great fluency and energy—

"No, sir; I didn't do it; but I know who did. 'Twas that bad, wicked girl, Hetty."

"What! your niece, Hetty!" cried Mr. Warburton, astonished.

"Yes, sir," assented this Spartan relative; "'twas she as set fire to the house, and tried to burn us all up in our beds."

"Come here, Hetty."

In answer to the summons there came forward a plump-faced country lass, shaking and crying, but not looking altogether the murderer and incendiary she had been represented to be.

"Now, then, what have you got to say?" asked her master, with the air of a judge to a prisoner at the bar.

The only reply of the culprit was a fresh burst of tears.

Miss Warburton came to the rescue. "Look at me, Hetty," said she, in a kind and gentle voice, "and tell us how it happened."

The girl turned her moist eyes upon the young lady with some appearance of relief. "Well, miss, Jenny Rowlands's little girl had a sore throat ——"

"Tut, tut, tut," broke in the old Squire with his familiar expression of impatience. "Tut, tut, tut! We don't want to hear about the health of the parish. I want to know why my house is to be burnt down, and Miss Lettice killed between the fire and the fright."

Mr. Smith and 'Miss Lettice' looked up at this ghastly picture; and, their glances meeting, the majesty of the court was nearly being broken by a peal of laughter.

As soon as she could regain a fitting gravity of countenance, Miss

Warburton resumed her prompting, "Put down your apron and go on, Hetty," said she to the girl, who was pleating up the hem of her apron nervously, when she was not using it as a mop to wipe her stained and heated cheeks.

"I was telling you, miss, Jenny Rowlands came up for some black-currant jam, and aunt sent me to the store-room behind the stairs for it."

"Now put the blame upon me!" cried Mrs. Bennett, throwing up her hands with a gesture that spoke volumes for the injustice and iniquity of the world.

"No, aunt, I'm not; I'm only telling how 'twas. And I was obliged, miss, to fetch a light to read the labels on the pots, and I left the candle behind me on the window. I suppose I forgot it 'cause it was so light outside."

"Very well. Now, Hetty, you must promise to be very careful for the future."

"I will, miss, I will," cried the penitent Hetty, applying the apron more vigorously than ever to her eyes.

"Yes; recollect that a great deal of damage has been done, and it might have been much more serious, costing some of us our lives, but for the goodness of God. You must take a warning from this."

"Indeed I'll never look at a candle again."

"An undertaking you'll find it difficult to keep," said Miss Warburton, laughing. "You can all go."

"My dear," said her father as soon as the servants had dispersed, "you should have let me speak a word. We shall be having the house in flames every other night when they see how easily we take this."

"Nonsense! Hetty has had a warning for life. Besides, papa, you would only have made us all laugh. Now then, what shall we do? Shall we take Mr. Smith to see the gardens, such as they are?"

"He shall see my pigs. *They* are worth looking at, I can promise you, Smith. Come along."

But neither flowers nor pigs were destined to receive Smith's admiration that day; for just as the three were passing out, a carriage drove up to the door with Jeffrey's lawful possessors, full of apologies and explanations for having been late in arriving at the station the previous day.

Mr. Warburton at once entered a vehement protest against his departure. "No, no; we've got you and mean to keep you. Mind, you came of your own choice," added the little old gentleman, chuckling. He seemed to think there was an excellent joke in this latter fact.

To Jeffrey the fun of it was not so patent. Even with the later events he coloured somewhat at the recollection of the method of

his arrival. "Yes, I have to thank you for your kindness and hospitality to a mere intruder."

"No, no, no ; dear me, dear me ! How little we know what a day may bring forth—thought your coming so odd ; it was the finger of Providence that led you here."

Jeffrey did not exactly see the reasoning, but he kept the sentiment within his own breast ; only maintaining that he must fulfil his engagement with the Lorimers, and spend the next week at their house.

So he departed, carrying with him the open, loudly-expressed regrets of his late host ; and a faint glance of wistful disappointment from Miss Warburton, that was instantly changed for a smile and a jest when she perceived his gaze bent upon her. But the sequel proved that he might quite as well have remained at Redbrook, for next day and every day found him calling there.

"Somehow I feel an interest in those people. Lettice Warburton is such a nice girl," he allowed, and deceived himself by the candour of the admission. "Not the sort of woman to fall hopelessly, stupidly, head-over-ears in love with ; no dazzling beauty to rave about ; but just a good, honest English girl, taking kindly thought for an old woman, rescuing a poor servant from trouble, carrying life and sunshine everywhere : who could help liking her ?"

It was the final morning of his stay in the neighbourhood, and he had ridden over to Redbrook early to make his adieux. The room into which he was shown was empty when he entered ; but the next moment Lettice glided in, her cheeks and eyes brightened by the fresh morning air, her hands full of flowers, with which to replenish the vases : a task she daily performed herself.

"I did not know you were here," she cried, upon seeing Jeffrey. "I cannot give you a hand, because both are full. Have you been waiting long ?"

"No, I have hardly been here a moment. I called to say good-bye, as I am leaving to-morrow."

"Ah !"—Miss Warburton's hands were disengaged now, for the flowers had dropped from them, and were rolling in a glittering cataract down her white robe to the ground. The brief sigh and exclamation might have been given to the catastrophe, or to the news just imparted by Mr. Smith.

The next moment she was speaking lightly. "How stupid of me ! Did you say you were leaving ? I thought you were going to stay some time longer ; my father is under the firm impression that you would pay us a visit before deserting the neighbourhood altogether."

Jeffrey made no answer : he was silently gathering up the scattered blossoms and replacing them in her lap. Something in the last few minutes had shown him his heart. What a fool he had been in talking about *liking* this girl ! It burst upon him, with the suddenness of a startling revelation, what a blank life would be without her.

"Will you give me one of those flowers?" he asked; as, his work ended, he stood waiting beside her.

Lettice had in her fingers two or three purple pansies; she stretched out her hand and offered them to him without a word.

"Heartsease! I shall need that when I am gone."

A slight frown contracted Miss Warburton's smooth white brow; then she looked up with a gentle reproach. "I did not think it was your habit to talk nonsense."

"It is not nonsense," said Jeffrey, eagerly. "Miss Warburton! you are dearer to me than life. I have been too stupid to know it, but I think I have loved you from the first moment I saw you."

No reply from Miss Warburton, save that her head drooped a little lower over the flowers.

"Give me a word of hope, dearest. Don't let me go away miserable; speak to me—Lettice."

"What can I say? And you are so impatient—Jeffrey."

It was enough for the waiting, anxious lover.

"Lettice, may I go and speak to your father now?" asked Jeffrey presently, when his raptures had somewhat subsided.

"You would not be anxious for it," answered she between smiles and tears, "if you knew the treatment other suitors have met with at his hands."

Inwardly quaking, himself, at the ordeal, Jeffrey sought out Mr. Warburton and told his story plainly.

"Never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life!" burst out the little old gentleman. "You saved her life, and now, forsooth! feel obliged to marry her. Off with you, and leave me in peace, and never mention anything so absurd again!—But, Smith!" he called out later to the young man, who was turning away baulked and dispirited. "Recollect that any time you feel disposed to pay us a visit, you'll find a hearty welcome here. And perhaps, perhaps—mind, I make no rash promises—but perhaps, if you like to come and talk to me about Lettice in twenty years' time, when you have both grown a little older and wiser, I may listen to you."

The wedding took place, however, in a good deal less than twenty years. It was celebrated with fitting magnificence; the bride was lovely, the bridegroom handsome, and there was a crowd of wedding-guests rivalling a flock of tropical birds in splendour of plumage. But Master Thomas considered that he, in a new suit of livery and a favour nearly as large as himself, was the central point of elegance and the crowning pinnacle of glory.

THE ARCHITECT'S WIFE.

I.

TOWARDS the middle of the fourteenth century, Toledo was invested by the troops of Don Enrique de Trastamara, the brother of that king, called by some the Cruel and by others the Just, to whose cause the Toledans were devoted, and for whom they were defending with conspicuous valour their native city. Many a time and oft had the loyal and brave denizens of the "City of Swords" sallied forth across the magnificent bridge of San Martin, and, throwing themselves with irresistible impetuosity against the besieging forces encamped in the Cigarrales, had inflicted on them severe loss. Indeed, so disastrous had these frequent sallies proved to the army of Don Enrique, that he determined to destroy the bridge, a structure of great beauty, and conspicuous even amongst the many architectural monuments possessed by Toledo.

But however indifferent Don Enrique was to the charms of the bridge of San Martin, it had a special value in the eyes of the Toledans, from the fact that it formed their only means of access—unless indeed by crossing the Tagus by boat—to the Cigarrales, that Champs Elysées of Toledo, whose praises have been sung by well-nigh all the poets of Castille.

One night the soldiers of Don Enrique might have been seen hewing down the magnificent trees which surrounded their camp, and piling them on the bridge of San Martin ; but with such care and precautions against surprise was the work of devastation carried on, that not until day was dawning did the Toledans suspect the loss they were about to sustain. Then, indeed, a horrible glare overspread their beloved Cigarrales, now laid waste, lit up the waters of the Tagus, brought out into mournful distinctness the ruins of the Palace of Roderick, the last Visigothic king of Spain, and illuminated the Moorish tower which still overlooks the river.

The Toledans, roused by this sinister splendour, hastened to rescue their favourite bridge from the imminent ruin which menaced its existence ; but in vain was all their haste, for a fearful crash, which echoed mournfully through the caves and windings of the Tagus, told them that the bridge was no more.

When the sun rose to gild the dome of the kingly city, the Toledan damsels who crowded down to the banks of the river to fill their jars with the clear, fresh water, returned with them still empty, but with hearts full of sorrow and indignation, for the stream of the Tagus was

rushing along, turbulent and muddy, whirling round and round in its boiling eddies the still smoking ruins of the bridge of San Martin.

The popular indignation knew no bounds, for the bridge, as we have said already, was the only direct means of access to the Cigarrales, the lovely pleasure grounds which the Toledans had inherited from the Moors, together with all the veritable passion for trees and flowers for which those barbarians, as they have been misnamed, were so conspicuous. The endurance of the besieged, which was beginning to fail them, gained renewed strength from the outrage, and the army of Trastamara speedily found itself the object of a series of furious onslaughts, which ended in a complete and disastrous defeat, and watered the Cigarrales with streams of blood.

II.

At the time our tale opens, many years had passed away since the tyrant of Montiel had destroyed the bridge of San Martin. Dignitaries both of Church and State had vied with each other in their endeavours to replace it by a structure worthy of it, both in beauty of outline and solidity. But the skill and care of the most celebrated architects, Christian and Moorish alike, had been altogether wanting in success on account of the rapidity of the stream, which carried away in its impetuous course the framework of wood and the pillars of stone before the arches of the bridge could be completed.

Don Pedro Tenorio, Archbishop of Toledo, to whom that city owed as much, if not more than to its kings, then made application throughout all the cities and towns of Spain for an architect capable of rebuilding the bridge of San Martin: but for a long time without response.

One day, however, a man and woman, complete strangers to the place, entered Toledo by the Cambron Gate, and after carefully inspecting the ruins of the bridge, fixed, for their residence, upon an empty house not far from them. A few hours afterwards the man might have been seen wending his way towards the palace of the Archbishop.

At that time the prelate was in the habit of receiving a large concourse of Church dignitaries, savants, and others, who were attracted to Toledo by the fame of his wisdom and goodness, and with whom he delighted to surround himself. His joy was indeed great when one of his attendants informed him that an architect from another kingdom requested the honour of an interview. The Archbishop hastened to give the desired audience, and the stranger was ushered into his presence.

The architect was still young, but thought and misfortune, had left

their traces on his countenance and rendered him in appearance prematurely grave.

After kindly returning his respectful salutation, Don Pedro motioned him to a seat directly in front of his own.

"Sir," said the stranger, "my name, which must be entirely strange to you, is Juan de Arévalo, and I am an architect by profession."

"You have come hither, attracted no doubt by the notice which we in Toledo have circulated throughout Spain, calling for an architect sufficiently skilful to rebuild the bridge of San Martin?"

"That is so."

"Are you aware of all the difficulties of the work?"

"I not only know them, your grace, but I conceive myself capable of overcoming them."

"Where have you studied?" asked the Archbishop.

"In Salamanca."

"And what buildings are there to which you can point in proof of your skill?"

"None."

The Archbishop could not help showing a certain amount of disappointment and want of confidence. The stranger noticed this, and hastened to explain.

"I was a soldier in my youth, but illness rendered me unfit for the hardships of a military life; and, returning to Castille, my native country, I devoted myself with ardour to the study of architecture, first of all theoretically and then practically."

"I regret extremely that you are not able to specify any building in proof of your ability," remarked the Archbishop.

"There are some both on the Tormes and the Douro which should speak in my praise, though the credit of them is claimed by others."

"I do not understand you."

"I was poor and unknown," said the stranger, "and when, unaided, I found myself in a position to gain food and renown, I was compelled to content myself with the food and leave the renown to others."

"I am very sorry indeed that you have no credentials wherewith to satisfy us that if we confide in you we shall not trust in vain."

"I have one which at all events may satisfy your grace."

"And that is?"

"My life."

"Explain yourself," cried the Archbishop.

"When the supports of the centre arch of the new bridge of San Martin are removed, the architect who designed it will be found standing on the keystone of the arch."

"I agree to your terms," replied the Archbishop, quite won over by the self-confidence of the stranger.

"And I will fulfil them," returned the architect.

The Archbishop held out his hand to the visitor, and the latter returned to his house with a look of evident joy.

The lady who had accompanied Juan de Arévalo to Toledo, young and still lovely in spite of the traces of suffering on her face, awaited him with anxiety, and hurried to meet him at the door.

"Catalina, my own!" exclaimed the architect, embracing his wife, "amidst the monuments of art which beautify Toledo, there will be one destined to transmit to posterity the name of Juan de Arévalo."

III.

No longer could the Toledans say, as they approached the Tagus by its rugged and almost precipitous banks, where in former days artificial caves had marked the gardens of Florinda—no longer could the Toledans say: "Here *was* the bridge of San Martin," for a new bridge, securely surrounded with massive supports and endless scaffolding, was already raised on the ruins of the old one.

The Archbishop, Don Pedro Tenorio, and the Toledans, high and low, overwhelmed with all sorts of presents the fortunate and clever architect who had succeeded in spanning the river in spite of its furious current, and notwithstanding the hazardous nature of the stupendous work.

On the eve of the Festival of San Ildefonso, patron saint of the city, Juan de Arévalo announced formally to the Archbishop that in order to complete his work there remained only the removal of the scaffolding from the three arches of the bridge, the openings of which were still blocked up with intricate and yet sturdy masses of pine wood.

The satisfaction of the Archbishop and the people was extreme. It is true that the removal of all the framework on which the massive but artistically chiselled blocks of stone appeared to rest was a work of great danger, but the tranquil air of the architect, who was committed to await the perilous ordeal on the keystone of the centre arch, inspired everyone with confidence.

The solemn benediction and opening of the new bridge of San Martin was announced to take place on the following day, with prayers and glad peals from all the bells of Toledo. From the heights which overlook the course of the Tagus, the Toledans beheld with joy and emotion their beloved Cigarrales, which for so many years had remained sad, solitary, and almost deserted, but, ere the setting of another sun, were, they fondly hoped, destined to recover their pristine cheerfulness and beauty.

It was toward midnight, when Juan de Arévalo ascended the scaf-

folding of the centre arch of the bridge, with the object of seeing that everything was in readiness for the morrow's critical work, and as he slowly mounted upwards he gleefully hummed the refrain of some familiar song. Suddenly the song ceased from his lips, the joy disappeared from his countenance, and he returned to his house full of sadness and despair.

Catalina, his devoted and faithful wife, ran with cheerful face and loving words to meet him on the threshold of their home, but as she saw the look of anguish on her husband's countenance, her cheeks caught the pallor of his.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake," she cried, "are you ill?"

"No, dear love," replied Juan, endeavouring to conceal his despair.

"You cannot deceive me," returned his wife. "Your face alone tells me that it is so."

"The night is cold and my work has been too much for me ——"

"Come, then, come to the fire," interrupted Catalina, "where the warmth and your supper will restore you to health and gladness."

"Gladness!" murmured Juan in a tone of deep dejection, whilst his wife turned to prepare their supper by the hearth, on which the oak chips crackled and sparkled merrily in the blaze.

Juan made a great effort to conceal his sadness and want of appetite, but he could not succeed.

"For the first time in your life you are hiding something from me!" said Catalina at last. "Am I no longer worthy of that love and confidence which up to now you have ever bestowed upon me?"

"Do not add to my trouble, Catalina, by doubting my love for you."

"There can be no love where there is no confidence."

"For your sake and mine do not seek to know the secret that I am hiding from you," cried Juan.

"Your secret is one of sadness, and I must know it so that I may comfort you in your sorrow."

"Comfort me! Alas, that is impossible, Catalina."

"To love such as mine nothing is impossible!"

"Very well then; so be it. To-morrow I shall forfeit my honour and my life, for I shall be swept away by the river together with that structure which I have reared with so much mingled anxiety and hope."

"No, no!" cried Catalina, throwing her arms round her husband and stifling in her breast the grief which his words had caused her.

"Yes," said he; "at the moment when my confidence in my work was at its height, I discovered that an error in my calculations will assuredly cause the downfall of the bridge of San Martin, and of him who planned and built it."

"The bridge may be buried in the stream, but not you, my hus-

band, my love ! I will go down on my knees to the noble Cardinal and beseech him to prevent your carrying out this horrible contract."

" You will but ask in vain, for, even should your prayer be granted, I will not live dishonoured."

" Then you shall preserve both life and honour," replied Catalina, firmly.

IV.

DAY was about to break, and Catalina appeared to slumber, whilst her husband, worn out by grief and toil, had fallen into a deep heavy sleep which almost approached unconsciousness.

Catalina got up noiselessly, scarce daring to breathe, made her way to the kitchen, and climbed out through the window which looked on to the Tagus.

It was still dark, and a star here and there broke the gloom.

Towards the bed of the Tagus no sound was to be heard but the rushing of the river, and the moaning of the wind as it swept through the scaffolding of the bridge of San Martin.

Catalina, before making her exit through the window, had seized from the smouldering embers on the hearth a brand still burning, and noiselessly closing the window after her, she set out, holding her breath even, lest a sound should escape her.

Whither was she going ? On what errand was she bound ? Did she take the burning brand with her to light her on her way amidst the surrounding darkness ? In spite of the obscurity around her and the dangers of the path, perilous even in the broad glare of day, along which she was hastening, Catalina was careful to conceal under her cloak the light which alone could show her the windings of the precipitous track she was traversing with a speed marvellous in one so delicately framed.

But after great risk and exertion she reached the bridge, through whose arches the wind still moaned, whilst the river foamed along with an angry roar as if enraged at not being able to overcome this new and apparently invincible obstacle to its course.

Catalina drew near to the buttress of the bridge, and could not repress a cry of horror. Perhaps it was that she found herself on the very brink of the boiling abyss ! Or was it that in her hand, accustomed only to do good, she bore a means of destruction ? Or it might have been the awful peal of thunder which just at that moment sounded in her ears ; or did she think that they who do not understand a sacrifice for love, might hold that a crime had led her to where she stood ?

Be that as it may, Catalina hesitated not, but drawing her torch from under her cloak, she set fire to the scaffolding of the bridge. The resinous pine-wood was speedily in a blaze, and the flames,

fanned by the wind, lapped the timbers with their fiery tongues and enveloped the bridge with fearful rapidity.

No need of torchlight now—and Catalina hastened back to her home, entering as noiselessly and with the same precautions as had marked her exit.

Her husband was sleeping still, and Catalina, hurriedly divesting herself of her clothes, lay down beside him, just as a tremendous crash announced that some of the huge blocks of stone in the bridge had given way.

A few moments later a dull continuous murmur was heard throughout the city, and from a hundred steeples clanged the dread alarm of fire, whilst the crash of the falling arches drew from the Toledans sounds of grief such as those which their fathers had uttered when Don Enrique set light to the structure which in those days had been their pride.

Juan de Arévalo awoke with a start. Catalina lay at his side, to all appearances asleep. Juan dressed in haste and hurried into the street, there to learn, to his unbounded joy, that the ill-fated bridge which he had built had fallen a prey to the flames, and was then in ruins.

Both the Archbishop and the Toledans attributed the fire to lightning, the thunder-storm during the night having rendered that explanation most probable: and however great their grief over the destruction of the bridge, they held their own regrets as trifles in comparison with the despair which they assumed would overwhelm the soul of the architect, when he learnt the full extent of the disaster which had converted into a heap of ruins the structure he had fondly hoped would be a triumph.

The Toledans never knew whether the destruction of the bridge was due to lightning or incendiaryism, but Juan de Arévalo, who had lived a blameless life, and believed that the good are ever under God's protecting arm, did not hesitate a moment in attributing the conflagration to the fire of Heaven, and Catalina asserted that she was of the same opinion. Surely God would forgive the falsehood of a wife, who, with it, saved the life and honour of her husband.

The burning of the new bridge merely delayed the triumph of Juan de Arévalo for a year. When that time had elapsed, on the festival, too, of San Ildefonso, the Toledans crossed the river by the bridge of San Martin to visit their beloved Cigarrales. And the Archbishop, Don Pedro Tenorio, at the banquet given in honour of Juan de Arévalo, who was seated at his right hand, said to Catalina:

“If with most men it is true that ‘the third time pays for all,’ may it not be said in the case of your husband and our well-beloved friend, Juan de Arévalo, that ‘second thoughts are best?’”

RHINE WINE IN RHINELAND.

BACK into Rhineland, back into the May-time,
 Apple and cherry blossoming above ;
 Out of grey London, gloomy in mid-day time,
 Into a land of laughter and of love.
 Glad with the sense of sunshine and of summer,
 Gaily last year we drank the Rhenish wine ;
 Singing our praises of the sweet new-comer,
 May—'neath the walls of Eltville on the Rhine.

Sang we the songs and legends of the river
 Swelling beneath us, jubilantly free,
 Into the sunset flowing on for ever,
 Bearing our jests and fancies to the sea.
 Rang the old walls of Eltville to our laughter,
 Shed the pink blossoms softly to our feet.
 Ah ! tho' Life's tears, like raindrops, follow after,
 Spring, in the Rhineland, whispers " It is sweet ! "

Summer crept on—the Sun God with full quiver
 Smiting the hills to purple, green, and blue ;
 In the deep glades of Biebrich on the river
 Scarcely the plane trees let the sunbeams through.
 Mid garden-groves, where music loved to linger,
 We in enchantment drank the Rhenish wine,
 Until the moon rose, and with magic finger
 Touched the broad bosom of the sleeping Rhine.

Ah, golden Dreams, September-crowned with glory !
 As by steep paths we climbed the vineyard ways,
 There was no peak, however grim and hoary,
 But gave its fulness in those autumn days.
 Merry at heart, we laboured morn and even,
 Piled the deep vats, and wreathed the patient kine ;
 Till, when the white stars made the stream a heaven,
 Restful we sat and drank the Rhenish wine.

Friends in the Fatherland, who gave us greeting,
 Held out warm hands to strangers by the way :
 Drink, in your Christmas feasts, to our next meeting ;
 Think of us sometimes when your hearts are gay.
 God keep your homes from sighing and from sorrow,
 Send you all blessings on your corn and wine ;
 That, while Time lasts, the wanderer may borrow
 Sunshine and gladness from the German Rhine.

G. B. STUART.

"THE SQUIRE SAYS YOU MAY READ THIS," SAID HUBERT, ENTERING.

